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**Discourses of whiteness informing the identity of  
white English-speaking South Africans**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts (Research Psychology)

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**2003**

## DECLARATION

I, Theresa Salusbury, hereby declare that:

- (1) this thesis is my own unaided work, both in concept and execution, and that apart from the normal guidance from my supervisor, I have received no assistance except where explicitly stated.
- (2) Neither the substance, nor any part of the above thesis has been submitted in the past, or is being, or is to be submitted, for a degree in the university of any other university.

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## ABSTRACT

Given South Africa's ethnic complexities, comparatively little has been written about the group known as white English-speaking South Africans, or WESSAs. This is partly because of the lack of collective sentiment shared by people categorised as WESSAs, partly because the group boundaries are not clear-cut, and partly because on the surface there appears to be little that can be said about them. Besides a proclivity for business, a continued attachment to Europe and an apparent inability to organise politically, the a-collectivity of the group has been the focus of the literature on the subject, and its cause has been a matter of some bewilderment on the part of authors. This work examines WESSA identity from a new perspective, one influenced by the proliferation of writings on the topic of "whiteness" in Europe and America in recent years. These writings concentrate on how whiteness as a set of discourses positions being white as neutral or "raceless", in contrast to other race groups who are constructed as "ethnic". Other writings have examined ways in which the ideology of whiteness is linked to privilege, property, capitalism and globalisation.

In the present study an analysis was conducted of the discourses of whiteness appearing in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans. Two types of interviews were conducted with 21 WESSA participants, and discourses of whiteness were identified in the transcriptions. The strategic effect that these discourses sought to achieve in the context of the interviews was analysed, as the purpose of the analysis was to investigate how WESSAs may appropriate discourses of whiteness in order to negotiate their collective role in the changing socio-economic landscape of South Africa. As discourses define not only their objects, but also their subjects, the analysis included an examination of how WESSAs constructed their collective identities through these discourses.

The analysis revealed that WESSAs employ discourses of whiteness similar to those identified in American literature. The group construct their identity as cultureless, normative and individualistic, all characteristic of whiteness in western contexts. The



group also strategically employed discourses positioning whites as more suited to material success than other racial groups. Furthermore, WESSAs downplayed the importance and integrity of politics, an arena in which they hold little power, instead constructing economics, an area in which they have far more collective strength, as a legitimate means to transformational success in South Africa. Finally, WESSAs constructed themselves as continuing to relate more closely than other South Africans to global (western) culture, especially through their language. This construction allowed for them to position themselves as social leaders who could translate international demands to other South Africans.

The discourses of whiteness found in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans served to solidify the group's status and power in a time of change in South Africa. They achieved this by positioning WESSAs as objective individuals, without nationalistic bias, and with global understanding. This construction allows for WESSAs to claim themselves as social leaders, whose opinions are impartial and in the best interests of all.

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## PREFACE

During the second half of 2000 I was completing a research project on white student constructions of affirmative action when I came across a discourse that I did not fully understand. Despite government efforts to step up affirmative action programmes in South Africa, when questioned about how affirmative action would affect their futures, several of my participants claimed that they felt entirely secure in their futures as they believed they possessed the talents, personality and capabilities that would allow them to achieve in the workplace regardless of affirmative action.

P1: But I don't feel threatened by it. I mean, I know I'm a woman so maybe I'm like *higher up on the list* than the pure white male, but I don't feel threatened by it.

Int: Why do you think that is?

P1: I think because ... I believe in myself as an individual and I am working for myself, and I'm, ja, doing the best that I can. And if somebody doesn't want that or recognise that then that's fine, then I'll go somewhere else. And I *will* get what I want. But I don't feel threatened that I'm going to *lose out* to somebody and I deserve it more. I don't have that kind of feeling of being threatened.

P2: And myself? I don't know. I've always felt myself to be, almost immune to it, um. I've always held the belief that if I work hard enough, and prove myself, and demonstrate my capabilities regardless of any affirmative action quota or anything, I'll be where I need to be.

What baffled me about this discourse of personal merit was that it simply was *not* personal. To have one participant claim individual superiority was one thing, but this was not the case. It was clear to me that this discourse was something that was utilised by many young, white, well-educated South Africans – and if they were all so confident about their futures, was affirmative action not failing in some important way?

It was on my introduction to the concept of “whiteness” that I finally felt I understood this phenomenon. The merit that participants were claiming was not simply academic merit, it was about “soft issues”: personal strength, the ability to communicate with others, the right attitude and so on. Essentially, what they were saying was that they knew the code that would “fit them in” to the culture of the workplace and allow them to succeed there.

This code, however, was unmarked. Nobody specified what the “right” attitude was, or described workplace culture, or in fact noted who did *not* possess the right cultural attributes to succeed in their career. And furthermore, this merit (that so many people claimed they had) was presented as an individual attribute rather than one that was possessed by white, well-educated, upper-middle class people. It was in Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness* that I first came across the concept of whiteness as an unnamed, unmarked cultural position – defined by its commercialism, its privilege and its focus on individualism. Then I understood that my participants were constructing merit to suit their whiteness, and were assured of their success because of the potency and breadth of their ideological position.

From then on I began to see discourses of whiteness all over the place in my personal world – which is largely a white English-speaking South African world, and I became aware of the extent to which my life and the lives of my WESSA friends are shaped by these discourses. This thesis, then, is as much about myself as it is about other white English-speaking South Africans, and while it remains a primarily academic

endeavour it is about my own struggle to understand my place in a unique social landscape, and to discover how to live in the country that I love with integrity and justice.

University of Cape Town

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **WHITENESS: KEY WRITINGS AND CONCEPTS**

Fifteen years ago the use of the term “whiteness” in the context of the human sciences would have referred only to the colour of something, frequently the tone of a person’s skin. Today the concept of whiteness is commonplace, its meaning pertaining to the practice and experience of being white rather than to a physical characteristic. The comparatively sudden development and expansion of the literature on whiteness has been quite phenomenal; the topic now extends into a wide variety of related fields including education and post-colonial studies. Stowe (1996) suggests that it may even constitute it’s own sub-field within the humanities: whiteness studies. Coverage of the entire array of topics and sub-topics to which the word “whiteness” currently relates would be impossible. This review aims instead to consider the key texts, concepts and issues in the field in order to provide a general understanding of the topic.

#### **1. 1 SEMINAL WRITINGS**

The early 1990s produced the majority of what are considered to be the seminal texts on whiteness, most of them published within a few years of each other. Interestingly, these writings sprang from radically diverse fields and bore, on the surface, fairly little resemblance to each other, although many relied on the earlier work of black scholars such as James Baldwin, W. E. Du Bois, Coco Fusco and Franz Fanon. Three fields in particular contributed substantially to the conceptualisation of whiteness as a coherent subject. The first of these fields was American labour and political history. Alexander



Saxton's *The rise and fall of the white republic: Class politics and mass culture in nineteenth-century America* (1990), for example, examined how the creation of the modern United States was shaped by racial processes, including the seizure of Native-American territories and the system of slavery. This analysis was revolutionary because racism was for the first time seen as integral to the social structures of America, rather than as a blot that could be removed from an otherwise egalitarian system.

In a similar vein David Roediger's book *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class* (1991) traces nineteenth-century industrialisation in America. He demonstrates that working class self-definition as "white" produced a sense of dignity in comparison to blacks who were characterised as inferior because they were largely bond labourers and slaves. Thus whites could consider themselves free despite their increasing dependence on industrial wage labour. It also allowed white workers the social benefits of recognised citizenship as the words "free" and "citizen" increasingly became synonymous with whiteness.

Roediger's book is considered one of the primary texts in the field of whiteness because it focuses on the *creation* of the category "white". Biological theories of race were largely discredited by the early 1990s and race as a socially constructed category, material only in its effects, was not a new concept. The construction of the category "white" however, had been overlooked in addressing the representation of oppressed groups by those in racially dominant positions. *The wages of whiteness* was the first text to trace the historical process by which "white" became meaningful.

If whiteness was constructed and not essential, then by implication the boundedness of the category was called into question. Theodore Allen, another writer in

this school, explains that: "In colonial Hispanic America, it was possible for a person, regardless of phenotype (physical appearance), to become "white" by purchasing a royal certificate of "whiteness." With less formality, but equal success, one may move from one "racial category" to another in today's Brazil where, it is said, "money whitens" ... In 1890, a Portuguese emigrant settling in Guyana (British Guiana) would learn that he/she was not "white." But a sibling of that same person arriving in the United States in that same year would learn that by a sea-change he/she had become 'white'." (1994, p. 27). A frequently examined example of the contextuality of whiteness and the flexibility of its borders is the fact that the Irish were largely seen as an inferior "race" by the British in centuries past, and on immigration to the United States were conflated on many levels with blacks. By political means, however, the Irish were drawn into the category of whites in America, and today would unlikely be seen as anything else (cf. Roediger, 1991; Allen, 1994; Ignatiev, 1995).

The second field to influence the development of what may be titled whiteness studies was feminist thought. The mid-1980s saw a crisis in what is known as second-wave feminism, a crisis that had been developing since the 1960s. Women from race groups other than white were questioning the right of white, middle-class feminists to speak on behalf of all women. They pointed out that race, class and sexuality intersected with gender in differential ways and began to articulate their experiences as black women, or chicana lesbian women, or working class women (Ware, 1992). Although white women had begun to investigate themselves as 'raced' in the 1980s (cf. Frye, 1983; McIntosh, 1988), two texts from the early 1990s were vital in their contribution to the field of whiteness.

Vron Ware writes, in her book: *Beyond the pale: White women, racism and history*, that “white feminists have managed to avoid dissecting these cultural and racial components of white femininity, although they may have become eager to hear what black women have to say about their racialised and gendered identities” (1992, p.xiv). Ware examines the history of British women in relation to black and Indian women particularly during the Imperial era. She notes, for example, how the abolitionist movement (which was supported relatively widely by British women) provided a language for women to frame their own liberationist struggle, and how British women were considered purveyors of “morality” and “civilisation” to colonised territories (Ware, 1992).

Written with the same intention, of exposing white women’s lives as “raced”, Ruth Frankenberg’s book *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness* (1993) has been particularly significant in the development of literature on whiteness. Frankenberg interviewed 30 white American women and analysed the aspects of their life experiences that were racialised. Interestingly, many of the women did not perceive their lives to be in any way shaped by race, but simply to be “normal”. Contrary to this perception, Frankenberg writes: “it became clear that, as much as white women are located in – and speak from – physical environments shaped by race, we are also located in, and perceive our environments by means of, a set of discourses on race, culture, and society whose history spans this century and, beyond it, the broader sweep of Western expansion and colonialism.” (1993, p.2) This then has been the major contribution of feminist writings to the field; the exposure of whiteness as a constructed category,

equally as meaningful as other racial constructions, and not empty, neutral or simply a-racial.

The third field from which writing on whiteness originated was film and literary studies. In particular, Toni Morrison's book *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination* (1992) has been heralded as seminal. "Until very recently, and regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white. I am interested to know what that assumption has meant to the literary imagination . . . what does positioning one's writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as unraced and all others as raced entail?" states Morrison (1992, p.xii). There is a similarity here with the findings of Frankenberg (1993), the position of white people is considered normative or central in society while only those individuals who are not white are considered racial.

Morrison goes on to challenge the assumption by white American writers that their work may be completely un-racial. She explains that the idealised modern American so prolific in American literature was, and still is, conceptualised in contrast to the silent presence of black and native American others: "These speculations have led me to wonder whether the major and championed characteristics of our national literature – individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell – are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence. It has occurred to me that the very manner by which American literature distinguished itself as a coherent entity exists because of this unsettled and unsettling population" (1992, 6). Thus no work of American literature hailing these traits

may consider itself to be non-racial because the meaning of being white has been developed specifically in opposition to what it has meant to be black. Richard Dyer in his essay entitled *White* (1988) similarly examines how whiteness in film is conveyed by its portrayal against an (often silent) backdrop of blackness; these ideas are later developed in his book of the same name (1997).

## 1.2 WHAT IS WHITENESS?

To the extent that the movement towards theorising whiteness has been stimulated and informed by the broader philosophical and academic movement of postmodernism, with its emphasis on decentring power, it is not surprising that the above writings should so timeously coincide. Together they point out that whiteness *is* significant beyond its physical attributes, and that this significance is flexible, constantly changing and has developed in response to the presence of others who are not white. In fact, whiteness *only* has meaning in contrast to these others. Furthermore, the boundary lines defining those who are and are not white are drawn largely for the sake of political convenience and are themselves shifting and contextual.

Whiteness is therefore not one, but many things. It is a culture and an ideology, a changing aspect of human identity, a social space or a set of discourses or practices, these things being closely intertwined rather than mutually exclusive. The concern of theorists to not reify racial difference as essential in their analysis of whiteness has meant that a social constructionist framework has often proved particularly useful (cf. Frankenberg, 1993; Supriya, 1999, Jackson, 1999; Mahoney, 1997). One notable exception to this is the work of Janet Helms (cf. 1992). Helms has developed a model of white racial

identity consisting of six flexible stages of racial attitudes. The basic assumption is that individuals move from virtual non-awareness of the implications of their own whiteness through various levels of mixed attitudes to an eventual emersion of themselves in race conscious thinking, which is assumed to be the height of non-racism. While this model is perhaps useful for understanding individual differences, it neglects some of the fundamental questions pertinent to the study of whiteness, such as why the same individual might be considered white in one context and not in another. It seems futile to examine such an individual's white racial identity under these circumstances.

Since the publication of the texts detailed above heralded the inception of literature on whiteness the primary concern of authors has been, in the words of Toni Morrison, to "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (1992, p. 90). In examining, theorising and ultimately revealing the discourses and material relations to which whiteness relates, authors hope to enable transformation of what it means to be white. As such, this "mapping" of whiteness is a specifically anti-racist practice. Frankenberg (1993, p. 6) explains that "To look at the social construction of whiteness, then, is to look head-on at a site of dominance. (And it may be more difficult for white people to say "Whiteness has nothing to do with me – I'm not white" than to say "Race has nothing to do with me – I'm not racist.") To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism."

The substantial body of literature that has undertaken this mapping has tended to focus on three main clusters of issues pertaining to whiteness. These bear considerable overlap with each other and are difficult to extricate, but broadly speaking they can be

separated as follows. Firstly, considerable attention has been paid to the invisibility and normativity of whiteness (cf. Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997; Mahoney, 1997; Nakayama and Krizek, 1999, Sleeter, 1994, Perry, 2001). There is frequently an inability on the part of white people to see their own cultural perspective and their culture is thus experienced as “transparent” and “empty”, leading to the belief that they are a-racial or a-cultural (Nakayama and Krizek, 1999). The assumption is that “culture” is a marginal position, something different or special, while “most” (read: white) people are “just normal”. The effect of this sense of normativity is in fact to marginalize those individuals considered “cultural”, “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human.” writes Dyer (1997, p. 2) “The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity.”

Whiteness as a location of cultural dominance is closely linked to the concept of modernity. In her study, Frankenberg found a train of colonial discourse that drew a distinction between “modernity and tradition in which “traditional” societies were deemed repositories of culture, and modern societies not so.” (1993, p. 193). Goldberg (1993) traces these ideas about modernity back to enlightenment thinking, which granted weighty authority to the concept of reason and rationality. Rationality presented its own ideology, referring to the ability to demonstrate a set of values and principles; those of “whitemales”. Peoples who did not conform to this ideology were castigated as “irrational”. The upholding of whiteness as “post-cultural” is, according to Rosaldo (1989) tantamount to claiming the position of whites as high on a scale of social evolution.

Individualism has proved to be both a cause and a consequence of the ideology of whiteness. As whites believe they are not members of a culture, their sense of individuality is heightened; similarly, this sense can be used to resist the articulation of whiteness and thus to perpetuate racial inequality (Mahoney, 1997; Jackman, 1996). Ironically, whites have even been found to romanticise ethnicity as a sense of identity that they feel they are lacking (cf. Frankenberg, 1993; Drzewiecka and Wong, 1999) and to “select” ethnicities with which to identify based on contextual needs (Waters, 1990). This serves to conceal whiteness as an ideology and to deny the inequalities caused by this ideology. After all, it is only whites that are socially permitted to be selective about their ethnicity instead of having it prescribed by dominant culture.

The second cluster of discussion relates to whiteness as a site of privilege (cf. Mahoney, 1997, Wildman and Davis, 1997, Wander, Martin and Nakayama, 1999; Lipsitz, 1995). Ideologically, whites have managed to perpetuate and reproduce the wealth and privilege that they accumulated through systems of colonial oppression (Wander, Martin and Nakayama, 1999). A widely acclaimed article written by Cheryl Harris (1993) entitled *Whiteness as property* provided the theoretical basis for much of the writing in this second cluster. Harris argued that whiteness in America became equated with property because only the property rights of whites were legally protected and further because the enslavement of blacks actually reduced black bodies and labour to a form of white property, denying blacks any ownership of themselves. Harris takes property to mean the fixed expectation of being able to exploit advantage from something, ratifying an earlier writing by McIntosh (1988) who describes whiteness as an “invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day” (p. 76 in



reprinted copy of article, 1995). McIntosh goes on to list forty-six expectations of advantage that she has learned to count on daily due to her whiteness.

Harris' article bears striking similarities to Roediger's *The wages of whiteness* (1991). Both relate the meaning of whiteness to its development in relation to slavery. The reason for this is that both are traceable to a far earlier article that has influenced a great deal of thinking on the topic of whiteness, Oscar and Mary Handlin's article *Origins of the southern labor system* (1950), which argued that racism was not caused by a pre-existing negative attitude towards races who were not white, but rather that it developed as a point of justification for the exploitation of blacks through slavery. The Handlins' article has stimulated a long tradition of linking racial arguments to socio-economic conditions. One area of literature on whiteness where this is noticeably prevalent is on the topic of affirmative action in America (cf. Wellman, 1997; Ross, 1997; Foner, 1997; Harris, 1993). Affirmative action is interesting in that it presents a direct challenge to the privilege inherent in whiteness and its discreditation is thus a rhetorical project of some importance in the reproduction of this privilege.

The third cluster of literature is closely linked to the second through the ideology of capitalism. Roediger (1991) demonstrated how racialised thinking was closely linked to capitalist expansion. In fact the historical construction of whiteness is inseparable from the history of both capitalism and colonialism. In part the development of capitalism was as a result of Christian values, particularly those of Protestantism. Dyer (1997) argues that it was the desire of western Christians to prove spiritual control over their bodies – a sense of mastery and manifest destiny that lead to the prioritisation of human “progress” and “development”. Expansion, both imperial and capitalist thus became the sign of

control of self and others. Similar arguments have been put forward elsewhere (cf. Brookhiser, 1997) and suggest that whites have a particular affiliation with capitalism and consumerism (and the sense of ownership that they imply) as these social systems are shaped by and contribute to the shaping of whiteness. Frankenberg (1993), for example found that when asked about their ethnicity, white women frequently identified themselves with consumer commodities or brands.

Capitalism is a global force and it is really globalisation that characterises the third cluster of concepts related to whiteness. "After two 'world' wars, European imperialism receded and former colonies secured their independence and the civil rights movement took hold in the United States. However, economic domination by and cultural influences of whites continued. International corporations, banks and development organizations, and mass media owned and operated by Europeans and U.S. elites have combined to produce what is being called the global economy or globalization" write Wander, Martin and Nakayama (1999).

Miyoshi (1993) is particularly critical regarding what he terms 'transnational corporatism'. He points out that the power of large capitalist transnational corporations serves to create a global hegemonic culture that is largely western, exclusive, privileged and English-speaking. Apple (1997) further demonstrates that this globalisation comes frequently at the expense of poor people in the third world, who are mostly not white. Global capitalism is just one aspect of what Blaut (1993) terms Eurocentric diffusionism (see also Amin, 1989; Said, 1993), this is the global spread of western ideas through powerful institutions, which causes these perspectives to receive privileged status in terms of authority. The fundamental point that is being made by these authors is that, far

from presenting a utopian multicultural global village, globalisation may in fact be the ultimate triumph of European colonialism.

### 1.3 PRESENT DIRECTIONS

The mapping of whiteness has been extensive over the past ten years and much of the current literature develops on the writings discussed at the beginning of this review.

Increasingly whiteness is applied to particular social circumstances, for example *Whites are from Mars, O.J. is from Planet Hollywood: Blacks don't support O.J. and whites just don't get it* (Jones, 1997) and *Bell curve liberals: How the left betrayed IQ* (Wooldridge, 1997). Many of these highly particular works, as well as variations of the more well-known writings, are included in the recent collections of literature on the subject of whiteness. (cf. Delgado and Stefancic, 1997; Fine, Weis, Powell and Mun Wong, 1997; Nakayama and Martin, 1999; Hill, 1997). Also contained in these readers are essays on the relevance of whiteness to a variety of disciplines, for example law (cf. Hayman and Levit, 1997; Lee Ansley, 1997) and education (cf. Chalmers, 1997; Cook, 1997; Sleeter, 1994).

There is one area in which the expansion of literature on whiteness remains innovative. Because the theorising of whiteness was generated within a climate influenced by postmodern ideas, it has been the concern of most writers on the topic to not essentialise whiteness. There is no biological reason that white people 'practice' whiteness in the ways that have been identified in this review. It is vital that the meanings attached to whiteness are seen as socially and historically constructed, and as such contextually and temporally defined. Frankenberg (1993, p. 6) explains that the

'normativity' of whiteness is 'unevenly effective'; her point is that whiteness as a racial identity intersects differentially with other aspects of identity such as class, gender, sexuality and nationality. Investigation of the function of whiteness at these different locations is part of the process of decentring whiteness – making it particular rather than general.

Examining these points of intersection, or specificity, is a project that has been termed 'Beyond whiteness' (Wander, Martin and Nakayama, 1997) and includes a wide variety of texts such as *"I'm white! So what?" The construction of whiteness for young Londoners* (Phoenix, 1997) and *Surfacing our-selves: Gringa, white – Mestiza, brown?* (Brinton Lykes and Mallona, 1997). Frankenberg (1997) has even edited a collection of works entitled *Displacing whiteness: Essays on social and cultural criticism* the aim of which is to capture "whiteness unfrozen, whiteness viewed as ensembles of local phenomena complexly embedded in socio-economic, sociocultural and psychic interrelations. Whiteness emerges as a process, not a "thing", as plural rather than singular in nature" (p. 1).

Notably various post-colonial perspectives on whiteness appear in this trajectory of the literature. Since writings on the topic have been overwhelmingly American it is refreshing to find essays such as *Colonial remnants: Assumptions of privilege* (Kidder, 1997) and *Whiteness and the politics of location* (Shome, 1999) that examine whiteness in the context of post-colonial India, despite the fact that many such authors are Americans living in post-colonial settings or western educated post-colonial citizens. Adding to this margin is the growing body of literature on whiteness stemming from South Africa.

## 1.4 WHITENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Considering the salience of race in the social history of South Africa very little has been written about whiteness. In part this is due to the ANC's policy of non-racialism during the apartheid era that encouraged individuals who were against the racial system to downplay racial differences in the common pursuit of equality. In post-apartheid South Africa, however, the uncomfortable fact that non-racialism is not so easily achieved has prompted alternative strategies of dealing with the continued tension of racial relations and stimulated the beginnings of theorising whiteness in South Africa.

Some of the earliest literature on whiteness stemmed from the same disciplines that initiated the project of whiteness in the United States. In the field of women's studies the importance, for white women, of investigating their complicity in systems of racial oppression has been explicated by Holland-Muter (1995), and the difficulty that white women experience in facing up to this challenge, including the defences that are used to deny this complicity are examined by Bennett and Friedman (1997).

In literary studies Nuttall (2000) investigates the experience of whiteness that is portrayed in autobiographical literature by white liberals, suggesting that contrary to the normalisation of whiteness in the United States, in South Africa whiteness has to do with concealment, masking and transfiguration. The demonstration of whiteness in this literature is, for example often accompanied by a sense of the splitting of the self from what it has historically meant to be white in this country. In this way, whiteness foregrounds questions of accountability and belonging.

The pertinence of South African labour history to racism, and ultimately to the development of apartheid has been examined in some detail in more general literature on South African racial history, however the specific relevance of class interests to what it grew to mean to be white have been less often considered. One notable exception is the work of Jonathan Hyslop who examines the role of pan-empire British working class demands (1999a) in concretising a homogenous British “white” identity: “In both the Australian and South African cases, labour movements took positions implying that they were not being treated as sufficiently ‘white’ by the upper classes, and fought to obtain this racial status for themselves . . . in both Australia and South Africa, the early twentieth century saw the creation of a racially exclusive welfarism which eventually underwrote the ideological incorporation of the white working class” (p. 4). Another of Hyslop’s papers (1999b) also includes the role of Afrikaners in an analysis of how shifting conceptions of white identity in South Africa, from racial to lifestyle/class based identities, allowed for the transition to a non-racial democracy to occur without too much overt opposition from whites. He claims that: “the rise of a consumerist identity did not of course mean that whites were automatically going to become more racially egalitarian. But a strongly individualised sense of self-interest was likely to come into play in making political decisions. Therefore, when in the 1980s political pressures on white South Africa became severe, the priority for large swathes of that society was not the pursuit of racial ideology, but the possibility of continuing to pursue ‘lifestyle’” (p. 5).

The most prolific author on the topic of South African whiteness is Melissa Steyn, whose writings (cf. 1997; 1999; 2001a; 2001b) explore the fact that in South Africa, unlike the United States, whiteness has not been an invisible site of privilege.

Steyn notes, however, that it was the appropriateness of this privilege, rather than the privilege itself, that was taken for granted or invisible to many white South Africans (2001a). While white identity was circumscribed and legally enforced under apartheid, the advent of the New South Africa has forced white South Africans to renegotiate their sense of whiteness. In a recently published book entitled "*Whiteness just isn't what it used to be*": *White identity in a changing South Africa* (2001b) Steyn examines these negotiations and documents the varied discourses used by white South Africans in the early 1990s to make sense of what it means to be white in a changing South Africa. For some this entails clinging to a sense of white superiority and resisting change, while for others a wholehearted commitment to transformation is made. In between these two extremes there are shades of ambivalence as whites struggle to incorporate social change into their identities.

Steyn (2001a) has also investigated what she terms "white talk", the consolidation of privileged white identity through rhetorical devices used to maintain the apartheid status quo as far as possible. In many ways this white talk accesses transnational forms of whiteness by, for example, reifying eurocentric norms and privileging the importance of global interactions over local ones.

The advent of a recent conference entitled *The burden of race?: 'Whiteness' and 'blackness' in modern South Africa* heralds the arrival of studies on whiteness in mainstream social analysis in South Africa. The papers from this conference pertaining to whiteness explore the topic in a variety of particular contexts – including the construction of Afrikaner whiteness through photographic imagery in *De Huisgenoot* magazine early last century (du Toit, 2001), the definition of South African whiteness

NB

through immigration policy over the past 100 years (Peberdy, 2001) and an analysis of the role of whiteness in the careers of white South African women doctors during apartheid (Walker, 2001). In addition, a paper on social engineering in a 'poor white' suburb of Cape Town during the 1930s and 1940s demonstrates how whites policed the borders of whiteness, while at the same time constructing what white people 'should' be like (Teppo, 2001).

While the extent of literature on the topic of whiteness in South Africa is growing, there remain many facets of daily life and social convention in this country that are fertile fields for analysis. It is indubitable that South African literature has much to contribute to a global understanding of whiteness, how it functions and how it might be dismantled.

## **1.5 WHAT TO DO ABOUT WHITENESS?**

It has been stated that the mapping of whiteness is a specifically anti-racist endeavour, but how does literature on whiteness address the problem of transforming academic concepts into real social change? Roediger (1994) explains that historically, efforts to display race as socially constructed have had few practical consequences, and claims that it is imperative that it is "incumbent on those of us who have argued that seeing race as socially constructed is a vital intellectual breakthrough to suggest where we think that breakthrough may lead politically" (p. 3). To this end he feels that discussion around the topic of whiteness is in itself a useful strategy "the central political implication arising from the insight that race is socially constructed is the specific need to attack *whiteness* as a destructive ideology rather than to attack the concept of race abstractly" (p. 3).



Frankenberg feels that the deconstruction of whiteness is vital for similar reasons: “Examining the coconstruction of whiteness and other racial identities is useful because it may help lead white activists (and also, for that matter, activists of color) away from the incorporation of “old” discursive elements into “new” strategies. I have, for example, argued that we need to displace the colonial construction of whiteness as an “empty” cultural space, in part by refiguring it as constructed and dominant rather than as the norm” (1993, p.243). Because whiteness, constructed as dominant and normative, serves to marginalize other cultures, the dissolution of whiteness appears to be a viable strategy. How this dissolution is achieved, however presents another problem.

Both Frankenberg (1993) and Roediger (1994) feel that this dissolution needs to be material and discursive if it is to succeed. Roediger proposes at least a partial shift of focus towards economic rather than racial issues (although he points out the dangers of disregarding race altogether) and recommends organisation along class lines as well as social policies aimed to destroy the material dominance of whiteness, such as affirmative action.

By far the most radical and innovative strategy has come from Ignatiev and Garvey, whose book *Race traitor* (1996) is a collection of articles from their journal of the same name. The authors encourage white people who are dissatisfied with the terms of whiteness to engage in activities that “disrupt” the normal operation of the social category. Cross-racial relationships, or moving into black residential areas for example, may be considered violations of the hegemony of whiteness. Although people who do engage in these violations may be “disowned” by other whites, Ignatiev and Garvey hope that when sufficient individuals do break the codes of whiteness, other whites will no

longer be able to assume the solidarity they had once relied on: "What if the white skin lost its usefulness as a badge of loyalty? What if the cop, the judge, the social worker, the school teacher, and the other representatives of official society could no longer recognize a loyal person merely by looking, how would it affect their behavior? And if color no longer served as a handy guide to the dispensing of favors, so that ordinary whites began experiencing the sort of treatment to which they are normally immune, how would this affect their outlook?" (1996, p. 36).

Whether or not Ignatiev and Garvey's philosophy is practical, one thing is clear. Simply talking about race is not sufficient to bring about social transformation. Material action is necessary and no investigation of whiteness is useful without some recommendation of attached political strategies to somehow subvert the functioning of white dominance. It remains to be seen whether all the writing and discussion on whiteness leads to any fruitful social consequences.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WHITE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICANS**

#### **2.1 WHO ARE WHITE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICANS?**

The first white English-speaking people of any substantial numbers arrived in present-day South Africa with the second British colonization of the Cape in 1806 (Paton, 1981).

The soldiers and administrators of the colony were shortly augmented by the arrival of five thousand more British citizens in the Eastern Cape, known as the 1820 settlers.

Today many white English-speaking South Africans (or WESSAs as these people are sometimes satirically known) trace their ancestry to these early settlers, or to immigrants arriving through some of the various other British assisted immigration schemes. There are, however, many white English-speaking South Africans who are not of British ancestry and their inclusion into an amalgamated and heterogeneous WESSA group, if indeed such a group can be considered to exist, is a result of the complex social processes of South Africa's history. Some of the few theorists who have tried to understand the collective identity of white English-speaking South Africans have failed to make a case for considering the group to be sufficiently coherent to have an identity in the first place, preferring instead to assume the a priori existence of the group, and then attempting to make general statements about it (cf. Foley, 1991). Before any such attempt is made therefore, it is important to understand whom the WESSAs actually are, and how they came to bear this label.

Further assisted immigration programmes designed to secure British-colonized territory followed the 1820 settlers scheme, notably in the more recently occupied Natal

colony. The British were eager to consolidate their position in relation to both the indigenous black population and the Afrikaners, but this organised immigration brought relatively few Britons to the colonies in comparison with similar schemes in Australia and New Zealand (Crapanzano, 1985). Independent immigration was also slow, with a mere trickle of immigrants arriving in comparison to Canada and the United States (Garson, 1976). The pace of immigration picked up dramatically with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold in the Transvaal in the late 1800s. The lure of mineral wealth not only drew independent diggers from Europe and its other established colonies, but also attracted skilled business and tradespeople of various European origins as rapid urbanisation opened up new markets (Watts, 1976). English-speakers from the Cape and Natal colonies also migrated inland to areas that had formerly been inhabited almost entirely by Boers.

It was on the mines that the beginnings of a white English-speaking South African group, distinct from a British South African group, could be seen. The existing anguish between the Boers and the British that culminated in the Anglo-boer war in the late 1800s cleft out two clearly defined white camps. White immigrants not of British descent were forced to align themselves with one of these camps and to assimilate at least linguistically with them (Maylam, 2001). Many of the eastern-European and Mediterranean immigrants learned English and adopted, to various extents, British customs. Substantial numbers of Jewish immigrants, fleeing from Russian persecution, were also arriving in South Africa during the late 1800s (Garson, 1976) and were later followed by eastern-European Jews escaping from Nazi aggression (Peberdy, 2001). Jewish adoption of the English language, and political values more closely aligned to the British than to the

Afrikaner group has meant they have socially been considered a substantial component of the WESSA group, albeit a culturally defined sub-group thereof.

The political importance of immigration to the two competing white groups was keen; while the Boer population was growing mainly from a natural increase in births over deaths at the end of the nineteenth century, the British group was growing from the assimilation of immigrants (Watts, 1976). The decision of who was let into the country became a political strategy employed differentially by British and Afrikaner politicians in the twentieth century. Smuts' aided immigration schemes designed to increase the number of British arriving were ground to a halt when the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came into power in 1948; the Nationalist immigration policy aimed at attracting immigrants who would assimilate more easily with the Afrikaner way of life (Peberdy, 2001). Although many of these Dutch and German settlers did assimilate with Afrikaners, some found their way more readily into the English-speaking group (Schlemmer, 1976). The most recent influx of English-speaking whites to South Africa came as a result of the tide of African independence that occurred in the decades following the Second World War. Malawian, Kenyan, Zambian and notably Zimbabwean whites, unable to accept black majority rule came to South Africa as the last remaining colonial outpost in Africa and integrated easily with the English-speaking whites in this country (Crapanzano, 1985).

The descendants of this assortment of immigrants are those people known today as white English-speaking South Africans. They are a primarily urban group (Schlemmer, 1976) and constitute about 35% of the total white South African population (Sparks, 1990). Although about two-thirds are of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic descent

(Schlemmer, 1976), others are of mixed, Dutch, German, Portuguese, Greek, Jewish, and indeed Afrikaner ancestry. They are divided not only according to this ethnicity, but by class, geography, religion and political opinion (Foley, 1991). Several authors (cf. Sennett and Foster, 1996; Foley, 1991) have pointed to the rather clumsy and rambling title 'white English-speaking South Africans' as evidence of hybridity. Given this cultural diversity it is not surprising that theorists are in agreement that the WESSAs have little or no sense of nationalistic group consciousness (Garson, 1976). Butler (1976), for example, points to the lack of community, cultural and political organisations that exist specifically in the interests of white English-speaking South Africans.

This is a curious phenomenon considering both the minority status and weighty economic power held by the WESSAs. How has it occurred that a group in which such a high degree of social capital exists has so little articulated sense of itself? The conundrum presented by this a-collectivity is probably the central question that has been addressed in writings about WESSAs, and theories abound as to why it is the case. Butler (1976) suggests it may be partly due to the geographical separation of WESSAs between urban centres, or because nationalistic ethos had burned out earlier on British imperialist sentiment. Similarly Garson (1976) suggests that WESSAs' past identification with Britain places them still in an ongoing process of developing a new sense of community, and Paton (1981) feels that the lack of a collective history of persecution has led to diffuse group identity: "we don't have the bonds that bind so many Afrikaners together; we never had a Karoo, we never trekked, we never developed a new language, we never were defeated in war, we never had to pick ourselves out of the dust." (p. 96).

In social psychology this problem has suggested the applicability of social identity theory to the study of WESSA identity (cf. Morse, Mann and Nel, 1977; Sennett and Foster, 1996; Dono, 1993; Bassiner, 1998). WESSAs have historically adhered to the philosophy of individualism and have resisted defining themselves according to group membership. Sennett and Foster (1996) investigated whether this resistance was related to increased national pride and relative group status in the years immediately after the dissolution of apartheid. In comparison to an earlier study by Morse, Mann and Nel (1977) they found that the salience of WESSA group identity had indeed increased, as had other forms of group identity investigated, including South African national identity. They point out, however, that this increase is not in any way sufficient to constitute an 'ethnicisation' of the WESSAs. The problem with the application of social identity theory to WESSA identity, however, is that it relies on the pre-existence of a bounded group – and there is neither a biological nor a sociological reason to assume the naturalness of the WESSAs as a collective.

## **2.2 WESSA CULTURE AND POLITICS**

Because of the lack of unity within the WESSA population there has been very little that can be said about the group culturally. The existence only of what Sennett and Foster (1996) refer to as "a ragged assortment of a few cultural WESSA-isms" has inspired a small amount of writing on the subject. This small amount has dwindled to almost nothing over the past fifteen years, partly because the English and Afrikaans are perceived as having grown increasingly similar on cultural and material dimensions (cf. Schutte, 1995; Paton, 1981), but also because the demise of apartheid has shifted

academic emphasis away from divisive ethnicity to either white South Africans as a whole, or to finding a sense of over-arching South African nationalism.

A few cultural charges have, however, historically been levelled at the WESSAs. One of these is that the label 'white English-speaking South African' suggests group definition according to what the group is not – not black, and not Afrikaans. Sennett and Foster (1996) believe that this "anti-ism" is a central characteristic of WESSA group identity, and is evidenced by the strict maintenance of in-group exclusivity through residential and kinship boundaries. South African social understanding abounds with tropes of such rifts, such as Cape Town's *boerewors curtain*, an imaginary division between English and Afrikaans urban areas in the city.

Some authors feel that this division is more than material, that it has actually permeated WESSA consciousness in a profound and enduring way. "Opposition is more than political" writes Crapanzano (1985, p. 37). "It is existential. It is a matter of style. It is consuming. It is oriented to the other: to the Afrikaner. Just as the Afrikaners appear to measure themselves against the English, so the English respond to the Afrikaners."

But is it not just to the Afrikaner that the WESSA struggles to relate. White English-speaking South Africans have frequently been represented as a minority 'caught' in the tension between Afrikaner nationalism and rising black consciousness. Sparks (1990, p. 46-47) writes scorchingly that: "the English-speaking South Africans are now a curiously helpless and rather pathetic community who do not identify with either side of the conflict of nationalisms they helped to create and cannot define a role for themselves in between. They remain apart from and slightly aloof towards the Afrikaner Nationalists whose political extremism jars them, but they shrink from the numbers and perceived



radicalism of the Black Nationalists. Faced with a choice between two unattractive alternatives they have opted out, withdrawing into a private world of business and home and sunlit leisure. Politically they have atrophied. They arrived in South Africa as dynamic entrepreneurs and imperial visionaries, but they have become politically powerless in the country they dominate economically, and they have no vision of South Africa's future or their role in it."

Sparks' critique touches on several elements considered fundamental in the representation of WESSAs. His depiction of the group as 'helpless' and 'pathetic' conforms to a common representation of WESSAs as futile and ineffective. This characterisation is best portrayed in Banning's (1989) article entitled *Ghosts with ears: The WESSA in contemporary drama*. She describes WESSAs as experiencing an identity crisis as a result of their silent complicity in apartheid atrocities and claims that perpetual inaction results from this conflict (Banning, 1989). "The predicament of many English-speaking South Africans is acute" agrees Butler (1976, p. 11). "They feel a lack of purpose, of direction: they want to feel they belong; and they are afraid of belonging: they don't know what to belong to." Although Foley is critical of the representation of WESSAs as weak, he concurs with Banning's perception of an identity crisis, in his view arising from lack of governmental control, and social and cultural 'alienation' (1991). Indeed the conception of WESSAs as impotent stems to a large extent from their politics, or lack thereof (about which more will be said at a later stage). Butler (1976, p. 12) writes that: "It is doubly galling to be condemned for policies which – no matter how they may suit our pockets and our prejudices – we believe we have had very little power to alter or to influence. And it is from this, I think, that one of our characteristic

weaknesses springs.” Although WESSA minority status certainly limited group political power, the question remains as to whether their inactivity is limited to the party political arena.

Butler (1976, p. 8) has also proposed another source of WESSA inadequacy:

“There seemed to be general agreement that the English-speaking South African knew very little about himself. This lack of critical self-awareness was felt to be a weakness, and possibly helped to explain certain unsatisfactory features of his behaviour.” Garson (1976) and Schutte (1995) point to the lack of reflexive literature by white English-speaking South Africans. Although various authors have expressed concern regarding WESSA identity (Crapanzano, 1985), in comparison with Afrikaners they have presented a minimum of conscious self-description. Garson (1976) believes that one reason for this lack of self-understanding is the difficulty that white English-speaking South Africans find in conceptualising themselves as group members rather than as individuals, and Lambert (2001) posits that the collective history of WESSAs is frequently not sufficiently positive to make remembering it a pleasing experience. When it comes to the production of literature, however, another factor may be involved.

✱ The importance to WESSAs of global belonging and retaining close links with western cultural concerns has been documented by most writers addressing the topic of WESSA identity. Garson (1976) states that WESSA writers may have placed meagre emphasis on WESSA ethnicity in order to present the group as part of an international community rather than a parochial one. Schutte (1995, p. 15) makes a similar observation: “These authors tend to regard themselves more as members of a community of scholars than as ex-colonials or colonials.” This preoccupation with global/western

culture derives from the WESSAs historical link with Britain. "Britain was politically, economically and culturally the metropolis; South Africa was a periphery", writes Welsh (undated, p. 4 - 5) "These assumptions bred an arrogance among the English, a sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority and exclusiveness. Afrikaners or 'the Dutch' tended to be looked down upon as simple rustics whose culture and 'patois' must inevitably disappear under the irrepressible impact of the British presence."

The Afrikaners bore a similar contempt for the British for their weak commitment to South Africa. They called the English 'salties': "they have one foot on African soil, and another in England. Their balls are hanging in the Atlantic Ocean", the Afrikaners would say (Steyn, 1999, p. 269). While South African English maintained its similarity to the British dialect, Afrikaners developed their identity through a new and unifying language, a language, as the name suggests, of Africa (Paton, 1981). Recently WESSA immigrants have certainly been reluctant to relinquish European, particularly British, citizenship (Garson, 1976) although this may be for a variety of reasons. It is not only the more recent immigrants, however, who retain an attachment to Europe; Sparks writes that "However long an English-speaker or his forebears may have been in South Africa, he remains also a member of a larger international community which he knows that, in extremis, he can always join" (1990, p.48).

WESSAs undeniably possess a proclivity for, and have made a substantial contribution to, business concerns in this country (Butler, 1976). White English-speaking South African economic success has been such that Ashkanasy, Trevor-Roberts and Earnshaw (2002) have included white South Africa in an analysis of what they term "The Anglo Cluster", a group of countries, tied by previous allegiance to Britain, who

substantially dominate the world's economy. Sparks claims that: "In truth the British created modern South Africa. Whereas the Afrikaners left Europe behind them, the English brought it with them. They opened up the country economically where the Afrikaners had merely penetrated it physically, bringing with them the spirit of a new age. They turned a subsistence-farming economy into a *Wirtschaftswunder*, discovering the world's most fabulous deposits of diamonds and gold and using these to launch the continent's only full-blown industrial revolution and build its most powerful economy" (1990, p.46).

Whatever the desirability of industrialisation may ultimately be, the English in South Africa were certainly the instigators of such development. More recently, Afrikaner nationalist government programmes propelled Afrikaner economic development, closing the material gap somewhat between the two white groups (Hyslop, 1999). The extent of WESSA involvement in business has sometimes been attributed to their lack of political outlets (cf. Foley, 1991; Sparks, 1990). Business has been seen as one arena, some authors claim, in which WESSA values can reach full expression, since their opinions are apparently so disregarded in political circles. Given WESSA minority status it has been easy for them to conceive of themselves as marginalised and their opinions as overlooked as if there were no commonality between Afrikaner politics and their own. But is this in fact the case, or has it simply provided the WESSAs with a convenient vindication of their role in South Africa's turbulent racial history. Butler's (1976, p. 13) question: "With what degree of justice do we wash our hands of the unpopular and bad aspects of South African policy and say, with a shrug, that we are not responsible?" remains equally pertinent today.

“There is the image of English South Africa ... as a community which is politically unemotional, unexcitable and undemonstrative, and more interested in games than politics,” writes Worrall (1976, p. 195 - 196), “going about its quiet way amidst the shouting and the waving of Afrikaners in the sure belief that reason and sanity will inevitably come to prevail . . . But far more important by comparison . . . is the image of English South Africa as the conscience of White society in race relations matters, and as the preservers, if not also the founders, of the liberal tradition.” This vision some WESSAs may have of themselves stems from several sources: the so-called liberal Cape political tradition and more recently the lack of support that white English-speaking South Africans have showed for the National Party and the very vocal opposition expressed by some sectors of the WESSA population against apartheid policy. In order to assess the validity of these representations, however, each of these roots needs to be fully analysed.

The liberal Cape, or southern tradition as it is sometimes known, refers to the assumption that British-ruled colonial territories of nineteenth-century South Africa were more racially democratic than the northern Boer territories (Maylam, 2001). Evidence for this liberalism comes from British imperial policy in the Cape in the early 1800s, such as the abolition of slavery, the qualified non-racial franchise and limited non-racial education. In particular, Ordinance 50 of 1828 allowing land-ownership and increased free mobility to the Khoisan people was noted as emancipatory (Maylam, 2001). Yet Maylam (2001) points out that these policies were *de facto* not as progressive as they appeared, and while the Boer republics were certainly discriminatory, British imperialism was by no means exempt from similar practice.

Franchise policy, for example, set the criteria for qualification sufficiently high so as to make representation nominal only for blacks and coloureds, and while British society backed the abolition of slavery, the influence of scientific racism was rising in the empire, which would ultimately have severe consequences in this country (Maylam, 2001). Welsh (1976) points out that the non-racial franchise may in fact have had more to do with consolidating English versus Dutch political domination in the area by allowing a limited number of black voters, assured to support the English, on to the voters role. In addition in British-ruled Natal, English settlers indulged in some particularly harsh racist behaviour, and the colony's 'native policy' has sometimes been seen as a forerunner to apartheid (Maylam, 2001). Even if the Boer Republics did exhibit more stringent racial policy, it would certainly be a mistake to assume that genuine liberalism had somehow become endemic to WESSA politics through British imperial history.

It has also been held that since the Nationalist government has been primarily responsible for apartheid in South Africa, given the opportunity, White English-speaking South Africans would not have perpetuated segregation. The low level of WESSA support for the Nationalists (cf. Schlemmer, 1976) is purportedly demonstrative of this point. At the time of its earliest instigation, however, apartheid did not represent a complete disjuncture from previous, British-supported racial policy (Maylam, 2001). At the time, many English-speakers were more concerned regarding Nationalist desire to secede from Britain than about the party's racially discriminatory policy framework. "These issues were more important than the policies of the major parties with regard to race relations, which in any event differed only slightly; both were committed to the

maintenance of White supremacy and advocated essentially segregational policies; neither disapproved of the discrimination on grounds of colour which was inherent in the 'South African way of life'" explains Worrall (1976, p. 199 - 200).

As post-World War II liberation spread through the colonised world, and international opinion of South Africa's policies grew increasingly unfavourable, it is certainly possible that WESSA political inclinations shifted in accordance. Paton (1981, p. 96) writes, "I do not regard the English as morally superior to the Afrikaners, but they would feel extremely uncomfortable if their harshnesses became manifest and their injustices became patent. The present rulers of South Africa are more inflexible than we could ever be". What would white English-speaking South Africans do if they did come to power? An old adage that "The English agree with the Progressives, vote United Party and thank God for the Nationalists" echoes Butler's comment that "we can now say: if we were not in a minority, things would not be like this. Our bluff - if it is a bluff - has never been called; and until South African politics is organised on very different lines, it never will be." (1976, p. 12).

Finally, the outspoken opposition of the most liberal sector of WESSA society has perhaps reflected somewhat inaccurately on the WESSA group as a whole. "Though small, it [the liberal group] is vocal, brave, and energetic and has managed through all the dark years of apartheid to reach through the tangled growth of the bitter-almond hedge and maintain an empathetic contact with black South Africans" Sparks has written (1990, p. 50). It is true that of those white South Africans sufficiently committed to have openly expressed opposition to apartheid, most though certainly not all, have been English-speaking (Paton, 1981), yet this in no way indicates that all or even the majority of

WESSAs believe in full racial equality. Foley (1991) points to the business, academic, legal and media as strongholds of WESSA liberalism, but Welsh (undated, p.17) notes that: "It is often held to be an anomaly that the English churches, students, universities and Press are out of step with the community in which they have their respective roots. Afrikaner nationalist critics, for example, find it hard to understand why nearly all of the English-language daily and weekly newspapers advance editorial views that are substantially to the left of their white readers."

Social psychological attitude surveys through the last several decades have shown that English-speaking whites hold slightly less conservative racial views than Afrikaners, although this in no way indicates that their views are entirely liberal (Foster and Nel, 1991). Findings also demonstrate that these attitudes have shifted increasingly leftwards, especially during the 1980s, (Foster and Nel, 1991) and may account for the overwhelmingly positive response to political transformation elicited in the 1992 referendum. Yet during the 1980s WESSA support for the National Party was on the rise (Schutte, 1995) and it was only in 1976 that Schlemmer reported that a significant number (61%) of white English-speakers agreed with the statement "Protecting one's own language and culture is less important than seeing to it that Whites as a group stay in control in South Africa". However little importance English-speakers may attach to their language and culture, this signals an undeniably conservative racial position. The responsibility that WESSAs carry for South Africa's past can at best be described as 'mixed'.



## 2.3 RE-WRITING WESSA IDENTITY

So far this chapter has presented a summation of the existing writing on white English-speaking South African identity. The aim of this thesis, however, is to provide a partly revisionist perspective on the topic. It is revisionist only in part because although it will engage a new theoretical perspective with the topic, some of the content is not unfamiliar, and because it attempts to explain only an aspect rather than the entirety of WESSA identity. Considering the fragmented nature of the WESSA group, it is surprising that a social constructionist framework has not yet been applied to its analysis. The story of the development of the WESSAs described at the beginning of this chapter, and the oppositional nature of group coherence, testify to its historically constructed nature. Furthermore each of the group's nominal components, 'white', 'English-speaking' and 'South African' are themselves constructions. The collective has been cobbled together due to social circumstances that could not have occurred elsewhere or at any other time in history, and without which any social conception of the group as a whole could not exist.

Yet exist it does, if for no other reason that that it has meaning in the South African experience. Few ordinary South Africans would misunderstand what is meant by the term white 'English-speaking South African', or would be unable to point out a typical specimen (although the exact criteria for group inclusion may be disputed). In this thesis the white English-speaking South Africans will be formulated as a category of people who, through historical circumstance, have found themselves positioned in society in a particular way, and because of this social location are able to employ certain discourses to their strategic and collective advantage.

In considering this chapter and the previous one, a similarity emerges between the language used to explain WESSA identity and discourses of whiteness. Words such as 'individualism', 'global' and 'western' appear in each. Crapanzano (1985, p. 26) claims that the WESSA response to his introduction as an American anthropologist studying South African whites was that: "they usually interrupted my introduction, cast themselves as informal colleagues, and began to describe the Afrikaners. When I tried to turn the conversation to the English themselves, they would begin to talk about the Coloureds, the Zulu, the Xhosa, anyone who might be of such captivating interest that I would spare them the embarrassment of scrutiny, of being the "objects" of research." This is startlingly reminiscent of Toni Morrison's desire to "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served." (1992, p.90).

The central tenet of this thesis is that, because of their stronger historical connection to Europe, white English-speaking South Africans, as opposed to other South African groups including Afrikaners, are able to draw on transnational discourses of whiteness in their understanding of themselves and their place in both South African society and the world at large. Critical also, is the strategic use to which these discourses are put. In contrast to most other authors (cf. Sennett and Foster, 1996) who describe the WESSA lack of group cohesion and ethnicity as a 'failure' (p. 203), the present work posits that this so-called failure has in fact been of strategic benefit to WESSAs.

The absence of an overt WESSA nationalism, for example, enables Foley (1991, p. 23) to claim that the liberal sector of the WESSA population "have – as WESSAs – enjoyed a measure of freedom from the sort of inflexibility and extremism which has

over the years tended to characterise both Afrikaner and African nationalism. Moreover, as part of a minority group without aspirations towards governmental leadership, they have been able to exercise a consistently objective detachment and disinterestedness usually denied to the major political antagonists. In all these ways, such WESSAs would seem to be perfectly positioned and perfectly equipped to play a vital role in the evolution of a just political system in South Africa” as if it were somehow possible for any collective, or individual for that matter, to be completely free of an ideological perspective. If Foley concedes that WESSAs do conform to some ideology, and he does state that liberal/oppositional WESSAs’ “commitment is given to a strongly grounded if often unarticulated core set of values, beliefs and ideas, which in turn provides them with political orientation” (p. 21), then is he assuming that this ideology is in some way superior, or more objective, than that of other South African groups?

Foley’s proposition demonstrates the effect that the veiled ideology of whiteness may achieve. Although WESSAs may be in the political minority, while masquerading as a-cultural and/or a-collective they are in a position to opportunistically employ discourses relating to whiteness in order to consolidate their social and economic status. If WESSAs are, as the collected papers in De Villiers (1976) seem to suggest, so acutely concerned about their collective identity, then is it really possible that they would continue to resist the development of cultural and political organisations? Or has it suited WESSAs to retain group representation as confused and lacking in ethnicity? The present study aims at locating the discourses of whiteness appearing in the conversation of white English-speaking South Africans and analysing the manner in which they are

employed, in order to understand how these discourses might help or hinder the process of transformation so requisite in South Africa at this time.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

##### **Post-structuralism**

The terms post-structuralism and postmodernism are closely related although post-structuralism refers more specifically to theory, the writings of a group of French philosophers during the 1960s and 1970s, while postmodernism refers to a socio-cultural era or patterns of social behaviour (Craib, 1992). Any attempts to explain what post-structuralism actually is are both practically and theoretically flawed as the works considered representative of this philosophical movement are heterogeneous and those theorists generally labelled post-structuralist: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Barthes and Lacan, resist unitary grouping (Poster, 1989). I proceed with this description, therefore, in the recognition that it is an oversimplified basic introduction to the concept of post-structuralism as is relevant to the present study.

During the first half of the twentieth century there was an upsurge in theories attempting to understand social reality as a product of underlying structures. Structuralism, as this movement was known, refers to “a method of analysis in which individual elements are considered not in terms of any intrinsic identity but in terms of their relationship within the system in which they function” (Bennington & Young, 1987, p. 1). Structuralism was thus an anti-humanist movement in that it downplayed individual agency and political power in contrast to systemic functions. Some of the most influential theories of the time bearing structuralist elements are Marx’s economic

theories, Freud's psychodynamic theories and most importantly Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist linguistics.

The "post-" in post-structuralism refers both to a reaction against, and a development from structuralist ideas. For instance, while post-structuralism retained an interest in the pertinence of language, known as the 'linguistic turn', this interest reflected a growing rejection of the belief in underlying systems and a focus only on the external and apparent. "The concept of sign implies that there is something signified, and the concept of 'structure' that there is something firm and ordered. Post-structuralism abandons these ideas: there is only one level, a surface level. There are no hidden depths in the world, and in its primitive form the surface level is chaotic and meaningless – a kaleidoscope" (Craib, 1992, p. 185).

The reason for this renunciation of anything underpinning language relates to the most fundamental aspect of post-structuralism, that is the critique of enlightenment thinking. The 'project' of enlightenment philosophy was the pursuit of an understanding of the 'reality' of the world, believed to be achievable through human reason and rationality (Craib, 1992). The problem with this philosophy, writes Poster (1989, p. 5) is that it relies on "the association of reason with a configuration of the subject as autonomous and implicitly male, as a neutral, contextless "transcendental ego" capable of determining truth in a way that associates truth with ontological specifications." The post-structuralists felt that there was no one underlying truth and that everything had multiple meanings depending on the context in which it was interpreted. Instead of seeking a single 'real' interpretation of the world, post-structuralists posited that individuals and the social world are constantly dialectically involved in a process of

becoming, and so they turned their attention instead to social and linguistic interplay (Hollinger, 1994).

While post-structuralists rejected the notion of bounded individual selves, Foucault in particular accorded greater political agency to social subjects than did structuralist theory. To Foucault, power and discourse were intimately related. Power was not a 'thing' operating from a single social position, but was rather present in all social relations (Burkitt, 1999). Thus dominant forms of power could be either reproduced or resisted by subjects involved in these social relations, an ongoing task requiring ethical commitment (Hollinger, 1994). The problem that post-structuralists face in terms of politics is that their belief that all truths are relative, invalidates one, more true, political position. The prime post-structuralist concern, however, is to counter forms of political oppression that are legitimated by recourse to enlightenment logic by demonstrating the relativity of such arguments (Poster, 1989).

### **Social Constructionism**

The ideas inherent in the theory that is known as social constructionism are in many ways a distillation of post-structuralist ideas. Since post-structuralism is a loosely-bound set of notions it is unsurprising that social constructionism is really more of a network of theories itself, and is plagued by a variety of debates and disagreements amongst its adherents. In psychology, however, social constructionists are bound by their common opposition to the philosophies of positivism and empiricism that have dominated the discipline for most of the twentieth century (Danziger, 1997).

Social constructionists' rejection of traditional psychological approaches stems from a few broad philosophies regarding existence and knowledge. The first of these is an anti-realist approach. While traditional approaches to psychological research have assumed the existence of an underlying objective individual and social reality, one that can be known through the rigorous application of scientific methods, social constructionism posits that our understanding of objects and events is created through social agreement. While disagreement exists as to the exact limits of objective reality, at least in so far as what can be known, social constructionists dismiss the notion of being able to 'discover' psychological truth (Burr, 1995).

A consequence of this epistemological stance is that social constructionists have shifted their attention from the individual to the interactive and in so doing have reintroduced the social to social psychology (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). Language, as the vehicle of social interaction, has assumed a critical position in social constructionist analysis; in fact, many theorists feel that it is the *only* legitimate site of investigation (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Emphasis no longer rests on what the 'truth' may be, but rather on the process of how certain 'truths' are constructed and how their status as truth becomes accepted.

Another related social constructionist concept is that there is nothing essential in objects that suggests the way in which they should be understood. Commonly assumed categories such as race and gender, for example, are held to be constructions rather than natural divisions of reality, our social priorities dictating what differences should be reified into categories (Burr, 1995). Because these social priorities differ from time to time and from place to place, constructions are seen as products of their socio-historical

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contexts. Knowledge and culture are therefore intimately linked. "We pose the questions we do and frame the answers we obtain in ways which are fundamentally, profoundly and intimately related to the activities we carry out" write Cromby & Nightingale (1999, p. 5). "We actively seek to explore aspects of our world, in particular ways for particular purposes, and in so doing create knowledge which we then take as 'truth' about the world. But other activities carried out for other purposes might have produced alternative 'truths'. So knowledge is inextricably linked to, and emerges as a product of, activity and purpose." The investigation of forms of knowledge production through language is, therefore, an investigation of culture (Gergen, 1994).

Social constructionism thus urges its practitioners to take a critical stance towards hitherto unproblematic assumptions in their own cultures (Burr, 1995). In addition, as knowledge is assumed to sustain social processes and structures, social constructionists need to consider whose constructions ultimately acquire the status of 'fact', and whose constructions are dismissed (Burr, 1995), in so doing social constructionist practice recognises the political and ideological nature of all social processes.

While the above description of social constructionism is simple and controversy-free, this is not true of the field in general. The influence of politics, in fact, is an appropriate point at which to introduce the most prolific ongoing debate in constructionism, that of realism versus relativism. While some constructionists see power as extra-discursive, in other words not socially constructed, others feel that power, like other concepts and objects is a construction produced through language. The former group feel that power is not reducible to discourse, but rather that language and discourse are situated within power relations (Danziger, 1997).

Power is not the only concept that is sometimes viewed as 'real' rather than constructed. Some constructionists have found that to take a position of extreme relativism such as that put forward by Edwards, Ashmore and Potter in their controversial article *Death and furniture: The rhetoric, politics and theology of bottom-line arguments against relativism* (1995), is ultimately politically incapacitating. If all knowledge is constructed there can be no grounds on which to adopt a political position, and if all beliefs are context specific there is no reason to assume a social constructionist theory instead of any other (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999). Realists offer instead some limitations to relativist arguments stipulating that certain things may have existence outside of discourse. Cromby and Nightingale (1999) for example, stipulate that power, materiality and embodied experience should be viewed as extra-discursive. Bhaskar's critical realist theory provides another position: that while our understanding of objects is constructed, their existence is actually real. In other words, while adopting a relativist epistemology it subscribes to a realist ontology (Willig, 1999).

Extreme relativists such as Potter (1996) suggest that it is neither possible nor necessary to answer ontological questions, and that the appropriate arena of investigation is therefore epistemology. This is closer to the theoretical position adopted in the present research. While it is imperative to situate the discourses discussed in this thesis within a context, that of post-apartheid South Africa, any discussion of such a context is predicated on the grounds that it is understood through a process of social construction. This is not to posit that context has no material basis, which would seem rather churlish in the face of the economic divisions present in this country at the present time. Instead it

is to accept that epistemologically, in terms of what we can actually know, this context is socially constructed, and is meaningful precisely because of this.

## **3.2 METHODOLOGY**

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research methods are hardly new, having been applied in the social sciences in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology for decades. In psychology however, the adoption of qualitative techniques has largely been as an alternative to the traditional scientific approach that is based on measurement, manipulation and control of research objects and contexts (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994). While there exist several variants of qualitative research, each based on differing epistemological assumptions, those psychological researchers influenced by the theoretical movements described in this chapter have found qualitative methods to be particularly resonant with their epistemological beliefs. These are the forms of qualitative research that will be discussed here.

Quantitative psychological research has striven to control research situations by eliminating as many contextual variables as possible in an attempt to discover the 'truth'. This exclusion has typically lead to the production of research that is so far removed from its natural application as to be almost irrelevant (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall, 1994). Qualitative research on the other hand, accepts that all knowledge is context-bound and thus works with the research situation by theorising contextual issues (Banister et al., 1994). Importantly, this includes theorising the influence of the

researcher, whose role is accepted as central in determining the knowledge produced in the social context of the research.

The tradition of qualitative research that embraces post-structuralist and social constructionist theory also posits that it is not possible to achieve an unmediated representation of the world. Quantitative researchers have typically tried to downplay the role of interpretation in the process of investigation, portraying their findings as objective facts. Qualitative research accepts that the knowledge it produces is by nature interpretative and open to alternative readings (Banister et al., 1994). In fact, this form of research tends to take as its subject the process of interpretation – the way in which people make sense of the world around them.

Finally, recognition of the researcher's impact on the research situation implies that one cannot study a process or phenomenon without in some way altering it. The obligation of the researcher to act with social responsibility is thus paramount in qualitative research (Banister et al., 1994). Political integrity must be maintained throughout the research process, but also the researcher needs to ensure that he or she is acting in the best interests of the research participants. These objectives may at times come into conflict. One ethical issue that has been foregrounded by feminist authors is that researchers have frequently investigated groups of people who are more socially marginalised than themselves, which has only served to reify existing power differentials (cf. Mama, 1995). Qualitative research theory asserts that the social implications of the production of knowledge need to be taken into consideration when carrying out research activities.

### **3.3 METHOD**

#### **Participants**

The theory of social constructionism rejects the notion that psychological functions reside within individuals, and thus that individuals are the legitimate subjects of study. Social constructionists prefer to focus on social processes and communication between individuals, and the idea of sampling “representative” participants is therefore nonsensical. Participants were selected for this study largely according to convenience, but also with the intention of selecting a group of people who were likely to have divergent life experiences.

I was keenly aware that the length of the interview posed an inconvenience to many people, and that participation was a large favour to ask from anyone. I thus recruited participants opportunistically, approaching a few friends, acquaintances and acquaintances of acquaintances. The participants are therefore all connected to myself in some way, but in many cases as loosely as being the neighbour of some family friends of mine in a different city, or the person who I had employed casually to paint the roof of my home. I had never previously met many of the participants in the study.

In addition, as social constructionism repudiates essentialist categories, the assumed existence of a group of white English-speaking South Africans, and exactly who may be considered a member of this group, is problematic. On several occasions during my research the immaterial basis of the category became apparent. One participant alluded to his Indian ancestry, another explained that while he had grown up speaking English his marriage to an Afrikaans-speaking woman meant that he mainly spoke

Afrikaans at home, and a third who had been a permanent resident of South Africa for twenty-five years, without taking out citizenship, got into an argument with his wife about whether or not he was South African after all. Accepting the artificiality of the category, I took social agreement to indicate one's constructed sense of 'belonging' to this group, and when I approached potential participants with a request that they participate in a study on the identity of white English-speaking South Africans, I took acceptance to indicate social agreement; that both they and I understood that they constructed themselves as belonging to this category.

All participants were informed that the study was for the purposes of research only, and that their confidentiality would be protected. They were told that any data that they wished not to be included in the report would specifically be omitted. Any questions or requests that they had either before or after the interview were answered to their satisfaction before proceeding. Altogether fifteen interviews were conducted with 26 participants. A full list of interviews and participants is included as Appendix A. In this appendix, as throughout the report, all names have been changed to protect the participants while attempting to maintain any indications of ethnic origin in the original names themselves.

## **Interviews**

Two types of interviews were conducted in the research process. The first was a direct discussion about being white English-speaking people in present-day South Africa, semi-structured around a fairly extensive list of questions that appear in Appendix B. The questions attempted to directly elicit conversation regarding culture, politics and

other related issues and yet were very open, allowing for the participants to impose their own interpretations as to what form of response was appropriate. While the questions in the appendix formed a basic interview structure, any diversions that the participants took were pursued and questions were skipped if they had already been answered in previous discussion. These interviews were intended to be carried out with small groups as it was felt that this would elicit more discussion and debate, and most were carried out with two or sometimes three participants who were familiar with each other. On a few occasions it was not possible to organise more than one participant and the interviews were conducted one-on-one. Each interview took approximately an hour, although this depended on the number of participants and their willingness to engage verbally.

The second type of interview was a life-history interview. This form of interview was selected as the literature on whiteness suggests that its “slippery” nature resists analysis and cannot always be accessed directly. As a discourse informing experience it seemed appropriate to evaluate the ways in which whiteness may have shaped participants lives. These participants were informed that the study was for the purpose of investigating white English-speaking South African identity and were requested to tell their story in whatever way they felt most comfortable. The interviews were slightly longer than the first type, and tended to last for approximately one and a half hours each. Further commentary on the utility and interpretation of these interviews is included in the final chapter under the heading “researching whiteness in South Africa”.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed using simple transcription techniques, the conventions of which are listed below. These transcriptions constituted the body of text for analysis.

. . . - conversation trailing off, or trailing in.

(.) - a short pause.

(..) - an extensive pause.

[ ] - a portion of the text is omitted.

*Italic* - while not explicitly exaggerated, emphasis in the sentence falls on these words.

**Bold** - words are exclaimed or exaggerated.

## **Analysis**

To describe any analysis simply as a “discourse analysis” explains fairly little about the process and methods actually used, as there are a variety of strands of discourse analysis, each drawing on different theoretical influences and with different goals (Burr, 1995). In addition, the practice of discourse analysis does not conform to any single set of conventions, and is often an intuitive activity, the elements of which are difficult to describe (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Discourse analytic approaches have in common a focus on how language is structured, and the effects that this structure has. They assume that the meaning that is created and constrained by language structure is a product of the social context of the language, and that since language reflects its context it may be analysed in order to gain greater understanding of this context (Burman & Parker, 1993). At its most basic level, discourse analysis is about the identification of discourses, defined by Foucault as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972, p. 49). In other words, a discourse is a cluster of language content, imagery and meaning evoked



through language. This imagery is used to bring certain aspects of existence into sight, to “allow us to see things that are not ‘really’ there, and ... once an object has been elaborated in a discourse it is difficult *not* to refer to it as if it were real” (Parker, 1992, p.5). The notion that discourses “constitute” their objects is heavily influenced by post-structuralist thinking.

Some discourse analysts feel that the identification of discourses is not sufficiently useful and that the contextual function of talk needs to be taken into account (Burr, 1995). Wetherell and Potter for example, believe that discourse analysts need to consider what a speaker is *doing* with his or her speech, and what is achieved by structuring a discourse in a certain way. They have adopted a form of discourse analysis that adheres to the post-structuralist influences described above, but in addition draws on the traditions of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology in order to examine the performative aspects of language in a particular situation. Their adoption of the term “interpretative repertoires” rather than “discourses” is intended to convey the notion that clusters of imagery and meaning may have varying effects when utilised in different contexts and in functionally different ways (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

This is the form of analysis adopted in this study. Transnational discourses of whiteness have already been identified and documented by the host of scholars cited in the first chapter; the present analysis aims to interpret the application of these discourses in a particular socio-cultural context. Wetherell and Potter (1992) believe that it is necessary to investigate the political and ideological functions of discourse, taking ideology as a process of manipulating material resources; this analysis aims to identify

discourses of whiteness in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans, and to identify the context-specific ideological functions of these discourses.

Finally, post-structuralist theory posits that discourses construct not only their objects, but also their subjects, allowing space for certain types of selves to step in as readers and as authors (Parker, 1992). This allows for the present analysis to claim something about WESSA identity, as discourse can be seen as an organised form of self-presentation, the function of which is to construct its subject in a particular way.

### **Myself, (and other pronouns)**

Before explaining my own role as researcher I feel that an explanation for my choice of the third person plural in my discussion of white English-speaking South Africans is in order. My main reason for using this form, rather than the first person plural, given my own identity as a member of the group in question, is that I do not wish to convey the assumption that my reader identifies with this designation in any way or to exclude readers who identify with other groups. At the same time however, I do not wish to make any claims regarding the social identity of white English-speaking South Africans that do not implicate me equally with my participants in the process of construction.

Not only is my research somewhat anchored around my own subjectivity in terms of the choice of participants and the topics and the interpretations put forward, in addition I acknowledge that my interest in white English-speaking South African identity stems from my own search for purpose in what it means to be a young, white, English-speaking person in South Africa today. I do not intend to suggest that I am somehow more

objective than my research participants, nor that I am less prone to defining myself in terms of transnational discourses of whiteness. The process of carrying out academic research in a western tradition, presented in written English, is in itself a reification of the discourses that this study intends to de-naturalise.

My identification with my participants according to this constructed category has, I hope, allowed a more open and less self-conscious dialogue to take place, which might not have been the case had I identified myself with an alternative category. Of course I cannot hope to relate to my participants on all possible levels, and my influence on the interview process is examined in more detail in the final chapter of this report. Finally, it is important to note that, far from being a purely egocentric approach to research, I believe that for 'white' people to research, and to problematise, their own racial group is in keeping with the ethical standards set by qualitative research methodology to not reproduce existing social inequalities. Not only this, but is also an endorsement of Toni Morrison's "project", already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, to "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served." (1992, p.90).

## CHAPTER 4

### CULTURAL DISCOURSES

Before presenting the analysis performed in this study it is important to point out that the separation of this analysis into three chapters is an artificial one, designed for the convenience of the reader rather than because the text suggests such a division. As is the case in discussing the literature on whiteness, the discourses analysed in this study are intricately related, and are reliant upon each other to achieve their rhetorical force. At the basis of each argument however, lies a premise about what it means culturally to be a white English-speaking South African, and thus the first chapter in this analysis undertakes to investigate these discourses of culture.

Steyn (1999, p.267) describes white South Africans as having a sense of “Present-Other Whiteness”. In contrast to white Americans whose cultural power has been “secure, invisible, and seemingly vindicated by the success of the United States as a global power under the leadership of ‘whites’”, white South Africans are more aware of the threat of racial difference to their cultural dominance. Indeed, in South Africa where white people, let alone white English-speaking people, form a distinct minority it is difficult for white people not to be aware of their racial and cultural difference. This logic suggests that unlike white Americans, white South Africans should be clearly able to articulate their cultural identities, and although it is outside of the scope of this thesis, the wide body of literature on the subject of Afrikaner nationalism suggests that this would not be problematic for white Afrikaans South Africans. In the case of white

English-speaking South Africans however, a variety of cultural discourses emerge to suggest otherwise.

#### 4.1 "No culture, just normal"

Frankenberg (1993, p.192) claims that "white cultural practices mark out a normative space and set of identities, which those who inhabit them, however, frequently cannot see or name", and while in the United States the majority status of whites renders this unsurprising, it is interesting that the same discourse appears in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans.

Sue: The common denominator is that we actually are part of a non-entity. We don't have a culture.

Mark: No we do.

Sue: If you think about it, not really.

Mark: But you're looking at culture like ... um, the Indians of America. We do, we probably just don't see it as clearly as we see others because they are so different to us.

Ian: ...we had to do a similar thing in school, in culture. We had to do a culture page, but it was a drawing over several weeks. And in this drawing you would describe, give conceptual idea of what you think, and how you think your culture is. And for us, or for me anyway, I think it's a little bit different, because I don't have a religion, I don't particularly have a culture as such in the word.

Antonia: So you have values instead?

Ian: I have values and morals instead, ja.

[a few more comments pass]

John: Ja sure, but you will, you will interact with people in your culture.

Ian: Ja sure, I'm not saying I don't but ...

Antonia: But what is that culture?

John: What is that culture? That's what we're trying to define.

Ian: Ja, well that's what I'm saying. I **don't have** my own culture.

Antonia: You don't have your own culture?

John: Ja, but you do.

Ian: I don't.

Antonia: You do.

Ian: Well what is it then?

Antonia: That's the question.

Dawn: Well it's not the Zulu's, you don't go off for initiation and ...

Ian: Well that's exactly my point, that's exactly my point, is that we're not, we're not Zulus, we're not Indian, we're not Muslim, we're not Buddhist, whatever.

[a few more comments pass]

Antonia: But they see us as having a culture.

Dawn: Yes.

Antonia: It would probably be easier for them to describe our culture than to describe our own, because we're so used to it, and it's just every, part of every single day.

Dawn: Ja, we don't look at it objectively.

[A few more comments pass]

John: So what's our culture?

Ian: I don't know.

Antonia: I don't know.

Ian: I **cannot**, I don't think any of us can put our finger on it.

[Later in the interview the family return to the topic of culture]

Antonia: Oh. I wanted to say that sometimes it actually depresses me that we don't have a, a rigid culture. Like when I did my course last year we did a lot of human resources, it was one subject. And we had to interview people of a different culture, similar to what you're doing. And I interviewed one Swazi girl and one Jewish girl. And they were so passionate about their religion and their rituals and their culture. And I actually got really jealous, that at this age the whole family gets together and slaughters a goat, or when they turn thirteen they have a Bar mitzvah or something, and I just wished we had something that we could sort of cling onto, and we don't.

John: Ja. The mere fact that we can't really define it, we're probably fairly cultureless I would think.

Antonia: Ja.

The above passage is interesting in terms of the variety of strategies that the family use to negotiate their culture as an empty space. Although Ian's outright denial of possessing a culture is countered by other family members, they are similarly unable to articulate their cultural position except in opposition to "others". The listing of cultural alternatives in the passage: "we're not Zulu's, we're not Indian, we're not Muslim, we're not Buddhist" serves to re-marginalise these subject positions while avoiding naming the centre. This avoidance is perpetuated by Dawn's claim that they cannot "objectively" perceive their own culture, echoing Mark's statement that we cannot "see it clearly" in the first passage. Despite this acknowledgement that the family does indeed possess a culture, the final consensus later in the interview is that they are "cultureless".

Another way in which the cultural content of the family's identity is represented is by Antonia's statement that "I just wished we had something that we could sort of cling onto, and we don't". In contrast to the marked cultural others to whom she refers, Antonia's discourse portrays the family as culturally empty, desiring to be filled. A similar discourse appears in an interview with Peter Petrakis, who is of Greek descent.

Int: And outside of your character is there anything else, like you said about the land and the bush, to which you tie yourself and your identity? Is there anything else?

Peter: Not really, and I think that is, you know, it, it comes from not having roots, and that is a problem. You know someone with stronger roots would actually be able to identify themselves very strongly with something – whereas for myself, you know it's a regret. That's why I'd quite like to identify with Greeks or something, but there's nothing really that I'm, could honestly say well I feel like I'm something like that.

Peter also represents himself as culturally empty or hollow, claiming that there is "nothing" with which he identifies himself. Like Antonia he describes wanting to "fill" this emptiness with a sense of ethnicity to compensate for a lack of ethnic or cultural identity.

Thus instead of particularising their cultural identity, WESSAs rely on a discourse of culturelessness that has been noted in the talk of British and American whites (cf. Perry, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993; Mahoney, 1997). The potency of this discourse is in its ability to represent those who use it as "unmarked" in contrast to all others who are considered "cultural" or "ethnic". In this way it constructs a normative cultural centre that functions as a hegemony. The following two interview excerpts demonstrate how this occurs.

Int: Ok. The first question is can you describe your culture for me?

Harold: God, that's a question.

Penny: (laughs) No.

Int: Why not?

Penny: I don't know. Because it's just ordinary. (laughs)

- Int: ...something you picked up on earlier. You were saying that the guys you worked with um, privileged, wealthy black people in South Africa are leading very different lifestyles and have very different cultural backgrounds from ... whites in South Africa. How do you think that um ... for all blacks in South Africa that cultural background will influence ... South Africa's future? I know that's a kind of abstract question.
- Peter: Jaaa. You know it's quite difficult because I don't think it particularly influences the way that they relate to the way South Africa is now. You know it, it doesn't ... their, their history and their roots don't, you know, I don't come in contact with them. You know, I would never have found out about half of the stuff I know unless I'd physically asked them. Unless I'd asked them, you know – what do you do on a weekend? Or you know – you were away last weekend, where did you go? You know, and – you've got a son, you know, what's that bracelet around his arm? Or something. It doesn't actually impact their normal lives.

Penny justifies her inability to describe her culture by stating that it is “just ordinary”, suggesting that in contrast to other cultures hers is commonplace, regular or of no particular significance. By implication, she is marking any cultural positions that do not conform to her own as “out of the ordinary”. In a more subtle passage, Peter describes the cultures of wealthy black South Africans working in a financial institution. He has been describing those elements of their lives that may be considered traditional African cultural elements, and contrasts these with their “normal lives”, meaning their westernised lives in the workplace. Peter has evaluated certain aspects of his co-workers lives as “normal” according to similarity with his own life. That which he shares with them culturally is normal, and that which he does not is therefore not normal.

A discourse of “normal” culture is dangerous in that it justifies the evaluation of all other cultures by the criteria embedded in the normative position. “Normal” or “ordinary” culture becomes the standard by which all others should be judged, and inevitably this difference is constructed as inferior.

- Int: Like, say for example black people moving into your suburb. How would that affect you?  
[A few more comments pass]



Richard: It wouldn't worry me, if there was, as long as they respected you know, the neighbours and they didn't, like, er, in Welkom behind (M) and (Z)'s ... they started slaughtering animals in the backyard and ...

Elizabeth: It was terrible.

Richard: And they hanging, hanging the skins over the fence and ...

Elizabeth: I mean it wouldn't...

Richard: You see that, then I wouldn't ... But if they kept, if the standard was kept, I have **no** objections with it.

Henry: Ja, but also if you look at your English schools today um, I'm glad our kids never went to an English school because they are more relaxed I think. There's less discipline there. And there's a *hell* of a lot more of the other coloured populations there as well, which (coughs) I'm not trying to sound like a racist but I'm afraid it does bring down the standard of schooling.

While in the first extract African cultural norms are being judged as sub-standard, this logic has been extended in the second extract to suggest that the mere presence of South Africans who are not white inevitably corrodes the norms embedded in a historically white institution (in this case public schools). While the former extract suggests that racial integration is acceptable as long as all races conform to WESSA cultural norms, the latter establishes an argument for the retention of segregation altogether in the name of "keeping up standards".

The argument of "culturelessness" is particularly suited to white English-speaking South Africans whose group status is socially disputed. If one has no social group, then one can have no shared culture. A discourse of culturelessness therefore functions in collaboration with a discourse of individualism.

## 4.2 INDIVIDUALISM

"Because the dominant norms of whiteness are not visible to them, whites are free to see themselves as 'individuals', rather than as members of a culture. Individualism in turn becomes part of white resistance to perceiving whiteness and indeed to being placed

in the category 'white' at all," writes Mahoney (1997, p.331). In accordance with Mahoney's argument, discourses of individualism emerged in the present text particularly in the context of discussion on the subject of culture, and were frequently employed with the objective of downplaying cultural similarity to others and group belonging.

Int: But what would differentiate us from the rest of the people living in South Africa.

Ian: I think it's the way **each** of us live, our own individual lives.

Int: OK the first question is, could you describe your culture?

Bradley: Very easy going. I like to voice my opinions and I'm a very honest person.

Mathew: Ja, people need a *cultureless* ... or at our age anyway, they need to find like a ...

Christine: Ja. Just sort of finding more about **everything** and understanding everything, and saying ok, I understand that but I don't agree with that and I do agree with that and ... everybody's becoming more ... completely individual. Taking little bits of *whatever* rather than having to be a specific way and saying that, you know, you hang out with everybody in Bishop's Court, and **only** your friends are there, and **only** your children go to Herschel and, you know.

In the first two excerpts culture and individualism are directly equated with each other. Ian and Bradley represent their culture as a product of their individual personalities (in Bradley's case) or behaviour (in Ian's case). In the third excerpt individualism is portrayed as a progressive ideology, allowing one to "find [ ] out more about everything" in contrast to communalism, which is portrayed as prescriptive: "*having* to be a specific way" (emphasis mine).

While discourses of individualism in American talk rely on the majority status of whites, in South Africa the a-collectivity of the group white English-speaking South Africans discussed in Chapter 2 provides a convenient discursive framework against

which WESSAs may represent their cultural distinctiveness as idiosyncratic rather than as communal.

- Int: Ok, so then say we include Jewish people and WASPS, do you think that there is a coherent group there? A distinctive group should we say?
- Antonia: No, I don't think you can group them together. I mean it's the Jews and the WASPS.
- John: Even the WASPS there's a whole wack of groups in that lot as well.
- Antonia: There's the upper-class, middle-class, lower-class.
- John: Sure, and it's economic, it's economically divided ...
- Antonia: Ja definitely. It's geographically divided.
- John: But even when it's economically divided it doesn't necessarily mean we form a group either, because you get uh, people who ... have made money uh, that are not necessarily part of the group.
- Int: The nouveau riche?
- Dawn: The nouveau riche, exactly. And we tend to go *mmmm*.
- Antonia: It's not geographic 'cause we live in a Jewish area.
- John: In fact if you look at us, we are *incredibly* ... um, what is the word I'm thinking of ...
- Dawn: Prejudiced.
- John: Prejudiced. That's the word, ja. (laughs) So in fact our group is very, very small. You're probably looking at it.

Through a process of eliminating other groups of people on religious, geographical and economic grounds, the Jones family construct their culture as confined only to themselves. John's claim that: "our group is very, very small. You're probably looking at it" serves to deny commonality with other similarly positioned white English-speaking people in South Africa. Construction of WESSAs as a non-group not only refutes common cultural norms, but also serves to obscure collective social objectives.

- Int: And do you think that, sort of, there are specific ways in which white English-speaking people, of all these different backgrounds, have um, behave in common or things like that? Do in common? Or like in common? Or dislike in common?
- Penny: Not especially.
- Harold: I don't. I don't think we're pulling together as much here. I think everyone's doing their own thing.
- Penny: But we have the same sort of goals in common.
- Harold: Well I don't know. I mean look at politics. The bloody NNP and the DA, and all doing their own thing and not going towards the same common goal I don't think.

Int: What sort of goals do you think that we have in common?  
Harold: There are no goals. I mean all the guys are just doing their own thing. Everyone's just worrying about themselves.

Harold's claim that "everyone's just worrying about themselves" suggests that because of individualism, white English-speaking South Africans are in no way working towards maintaining their collective power and status in the country. Individualism thus serves WESSA needs very well, denying past or present group political strategies. It is therefore not surprising that other discourses in the texts also served to avoid or denounce group commonality and classification.

Int: If I say to you, I'm interviewing you because you're a white English-speaking South African, or WESSA (laughs), how do you feel about being called, being called that?  
Amanda: Um ... it's kind of, it's kind of weird because it kind of sets me apart from the rest. I remember sitting in that class and (laughs) certain people were excluded because they weren't part of that group. So maybe ...  
Int: So you say it sets you apart from the rest, say as opposed to being a white Afrikaans-speaking South African, or a black Xhosa-speaking South African, or a Capetonian South African? What is different ... you said it sets you apart from the rest?  
Amanda: Ja, I, I wouldn't say there's lots of, anything to do with conflict or anything like that. But, just when you kind of give me a, or us a name, then that does automatically ... there's a distinction, and a group is made up.  
Int: But normally you don't feel that that is a group?  
Amanda: No. I don't even think of myself as, as in that group really.  
Int: Oh, that's interesting. Do you see white English-speaking South Africans as a group, or not ...?  
Amanda: Not really, I guess I see more ... sometimes but not really. I saw more the distinction between black and white, um ... and if I were to go even further along that, then I'd maybe say English and Afrikaans.

While difference is reified in the above passage through the statement "I saw more the distinction between black and white, um ... and if I were to go even further along that, then I'd maybe say English and Afrikaans" group distinction is nonetheless avoided through the denial of perceiving white English-speaking South Africans as a defined collective. Furthermore, a moralistic element is subtly introduced through the inclusion

of the politically-loaded term “excluded”. The naming of social groups is characterised as an inegalitarian practice. The moral superiority of group-avoidant discourse is further demonstrated in the passage below, in which Mathew makes the normative claim that he doesn’t feel people “should” be “put” in classes.

Int:       Ok – this is a difficult one. To what social class would you say you belong? And why?

[Christine answers first]

Mathew: I don’t think that they should be put in classes, *personally*.

[A few more comments pass]

Int:       I’m interested in the fact that you say you don’t think other people should be put in classes.

Mathew: Ja. I don’t feel that, well I don’t *think* that way so ... I suppose if other people want to think that way it’s fine, but I don’t feel the need for it.

Mathew’s statement is similar to that of Amanda in that both represent group designation as being applied artificially from some external force rather than as having arisen from structural elements within society. This discourse is perhaps given strength by apartheid history in which South Africans were divided into population groups using bizarrely contrived methods. Now commonly seen as a travesty of human rights, this historically contextual factor encourages the adoption of a discourse of “sameness”, of universal commonality in which social division is seen as both unnecessary and prejudicial. Frankenberg (1993), however, points out that this discourse is really “power evasive” in that it reduces social inequality to individual failure rather than to structural injustice.

In the South African context individualistic discourses also provide one way in which whites may negotiate the difficulty of being responsible as a group for apartheid. While on a group level this responsibility is undeniable, on an individual level responsibility is

far more diffuse. To avoid categorising oneself as a group member may provide a discursive means of refuting blame.

Int: The question is basically how do you feel about being a white South African, basically, now?

Dawn: I'm **fine** with it. I don't feel guilty about anything.

Antonia: Mm, because you personally didn't do anything that was ...

Dawn: **Nothing**. And, and I, and people always say – oh well we can't find anyone that voted Nat. Well I can say I **never** voted Nat. **ever**. Not even as a trial where, I know John's dad had a theory, we can all vote NP and that'll give them enough power to split and go off and one lot be the, the verligtes and the kramptes. It would give the vote, it would give power to the verligtes to move off and be a proper government.

[Several more comments pass]

Dawn: I don't feel guilty in the slightest bit. I think black people that I've been in contact with as in gardeners and, and domestics and so on, I think we've, in our **tiny** little sphere of influence tried to help as much as we could. If it meant getting papers or, or a reference, or...

Antonia: A fake ID (laughs).

Dawn: A fake ID. Or, or helping out, or advice, or um an extra loan here or ...

Antonia: Or medicine or whatever it is.

Dawn: All you **can** do is the tiny little sphere of influence that you come across, and I don't', I don't, I feel perfectly OK about it.

John: Ja, because I think also, the servants that you've had or people who have worked for you, I think you've treated them very well.

Jared: I, but I don't, I don't see why I should be labelled a racist, because I'm a white South African. I haven't hurt anybody **because** they are black. I haven't slandered anybody **because** they're black. I haven't committed any such crimes.

While WESSAs may have recourse to a discourse of individualism when it is rhetorically convenient, others are not always permitted the same flexibility, and may be characterised as immutably communal.

Harold: If all of us whites got together. We don't get together. I think quite honestly, you know, if you want to look at racialism, you know, whites aren't as racial as the blacks. They're really, they're really bastards. I reckon they, so I don't have any say. If we, we don't get together, look at the blacks, when they want to sort something out, like the taxis, they just boycott. They go and bog the taxis. They get together and it works. We don't.

Int: Why do you think that is that we don't?

Penny: I don't think anybody feels strongly enough about the issues.

Harold: Not that. You can't go and cause havoc to some other guy. You can't go and affect his life, you know. They don't, they don't care, they just go. And they go on that Pretoria highway, drive to Pretoria, block the whole highway. I mean you see whites can't do that. They can't stop the people trying to get to work.

Harold's description of black communal strength functions in several ways. While he portrays whites as having a greater sense of respect for the rights of individuals "You can't go and cause havoc to some other guy. You can't go and affect his life you know", he also structures his argument in a way that portrays whites as communally weak and incapacitated in the face of black collectivism. Once again this collectivism is attacked from a moral perspective as "racialism", regardless of what function it fulfils.

The adoption of individualistic discourses by white English-speaking South Africans is thus convenient given the political context in which they find themselves. To construct WESSAs as a diffuse group as past authors have done serves to contribute to this individualistic ideology and to perpetuate the concealment of collective norms and strategies employed in the interests of WESSAs as a group.

#### **4.3 CULTURAL FLEXIBILITY**

A third key discourse that links white English-speaking South Africans' descriptions of their culture to discourses of whiteness identified by American authors is that of cultural flexibility. In a study of white youths in American high-schools Perry (2001) found that the teenagers conceptualised themselves as "cultureless" based on their construction of culture as in some way tied to the past. Antonia's suggestion that culture is something to "cling onto" and Peter's discussion of "history and roots" earlier in the chapter reflect a similar representation of ethnicity as anchored in the past and thus

fixed and unchanging. Interestingly, while cultural and ethnic “others” are characterised as culturally immutable, WESSAs are constructed as culturally adaptable.

- Int: OK. The first question is ... can you describe your culture?  
Mark: Can you describe our culture?  
Sue: Western (laughs). Christian-based.  
Mark: Ja, I think we're westernised Christians, but, um, pretty non-specific.  
Sue: Mmm. Ja. You can't label us as such actually.  
Int: Non-specific? You mean like, um ...?  
Mark: I'm no, um. We don't hold onto a history and a tradition as aggressively as most other cultures. That I perceive, um.  
Sue: In fact we like to explore other cultures, 'cause it might be a fad or a fashion, or ... you know. People in London do their homes out very African style because that is the fashion, or Moroccan style, you know. And we might go to Japan and come back and do a whole Zen scenario and also live the thing – elements of lifestyle as well. But I think you take it on fully. So, ja, we're quite ... wide, um.
- Int: Why do you say Afrikaans people will have more of a problem than ...  
John: Because I think they have more of a difficulty to adapt. Ok, they still have, um, I think they have more prejudice than we do generally speaking. And I mean it's a hell of a generalisation, sure, but they, they have more prejudice than we have you know. Um ...  
Dawn: And they believe so vehemently in their fervent, Afrikaner nationalism whereas the, I think the white English-speaking South African has been more of a sort of, we've managed to sort of slither and slide and metamorphose and ...  
John: Because we're almost cultureless.  
Dawn: Perhaps.  
Antonia: Perhaps we can adapt easily, ja.  
John: Sure, we don't have a culture so we can...  
Antonia: Pick up anybody else's.  
John: Ja. We can mould to somebody else's.

This flexibility is portrayed as fundamentally positive. Sue characterises WESSAs as being culturally “wide” in the above extract, suggesting an open approach to life and John and Dawn use cultural mutability as an argumentative device in constructing WESSAs as less prejudiced and more suited to living in modern South Africa than white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. Cultural flexibility is portrayed as beneficial to those who are able to access it, allowing for better adaptation to, and exploitation of, changing social conditions.



John: But English-speaking South Africans are **incredibly** resourceful. More so than most other South African peoples, and I think because of that our future's great.

Int: So what you're saying is that we are going to take advantage of the situation and actually **improve** our ...

Dawn: Improve, adapt, modify. Maybe because we're such chameleons in a way.

John: No but I, I also think, you know, the first question you asked us is bothering me, you know, what is your culture? I think we don't have a culture.

Antonia: We're just adaptable.

John: Ja, and because we don't have a culture we go with the opportunities.

Antonia: We could even go and live in China and adapt.

Christine: Um, I think people are realizing that when you **do** try and keep this culture in a specific way, it's ... it, people can't keep within those boundaries, and they're not comfortable, and then suddenly they're outcast. And you can't have everybody becoming outcast. So it's like finding that equilibrium of how you can be who you need to be and not be judged as this, a specific type of person. Um, I had another train of thought but it's disappeared.

Not only is cultural flexibility constructed as adaptive, but also as progressive in Christine's claim that it is "finding an equilibrium of how you can be who you need to be and not be judged". The Jones family's above discussion regarding group resourcefulness reflects Perry's (2001) claim that while other ethnic identities are viewed as rooted in the past, white identities are seen as oriented to the present or to the future. John's claim that "we go with the opportunities" suggests that WESSAs are naturally inclined to take advantage of present or future circumstances. This freedom needs to be seen in contrast to those others who are marked by the "historical" or "traditional" construction of their cultural identities. While WESSAs are discursively allowed to shift their cultural position, a discourse of tradition may serve to rhetorically restrict cultural adaptation and thus confine others to certain cultural positions.

Sue: I, ja, I think a lot of the South African cultures, like the black cultures are actually almost losing their cultures.  
 Int: In what sense?  
 Sue: Becoming more western.  
 Mark: It's a modernising process.  
 Sue: Even the Muslims. I mean, I know quite a few Muslims who, you know they aren't supposed to drink, and they have a whole lot of ... I can tell you know, a whole lot of Muslims drink at the office parties, and their families would pale if they knew (laughs).

Christine: It's reminding me of, in England, the black people that are there really are ... different coloured skin and that's it. I mean, you listen to the cockney accents that come out of their mouth, and being there, and there's been so much racism for so long they've been *forced* to be white basically. And that's the only way they survive, and so they *are*. And this is what's happening here, is now these children are forced to be brought up in this white culture, and they are losing their real identities. They've been brought up without a real identity basically. And I suppose they're happy, they don't know anything different. But when they're *older* they may resent the aspect that they weren't allowed to know anything about their roots or whatever. It's, ja, it's not giving them the option of being who they need to be.

While cultural change is constructed as natural and progressive in the case of white English-speaking South Africans, in the above passages cultural change in other groups of people is seen as unfortunate and unnatural. Both Sue and Christine describe the groups to which they refer as "losing" their cultures. The cultural traditions of others are portrayed as being corroded by western culture. In keeping with the concept of western culture as "culturelessness" Christine describes young black Londoners as not having a "real" identity, as though identity is something that is only authentic if it does not mutate. Her claim that they have been "brought up *without* a real identity" (emphasis mine) assumes that while African cultures are something, and western culture nothing, leaving one without an identity.

The major consequence of constructing white English-speakers as culturally flexible while at the same time constructing other groups as culturally fixed is that of discursive freedom. WESSAs may emphasise or downplay any aspect of their identity, and may

claim to have changed as a group. Should other groups attempt these manoeuvres however, they risk being accused of violating their cultural norms or of “forgetting” their roots. This will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

The discourses presented in this chapter have sought to illustrate how white English-speaking South Africans employ trans-national discourses of whiteness similar to those found in America and Britain in the discursive articulation of their collective identity. This is anomalous in that these discourses originated in contexts where whites are substantially in the majority, and to a large extent relied on this status in the normalisation of an ideology of whiteness. In South Africa, however, whites, particularly white English-speakers, form a clear minority. This analysis hopes to demonstrate that, in contrast to employing discursive repertoires that emphasise this subordination, the utilisation of discourses of whiteness as they are found in the talk of American and British whites serves the needs of white English-speaking South Africans well in negotiating the maintenance of their status as South Africa as a society attempts radical transformation. These cultural discourses underlie much of the discussion in the following two chapters, in which the strategic effect to which they are put will be further examined.

## CHAPTER 5

### ECONOMIC DISCOURSES

A portion of the literature on whiteness discussed in Chapter one attends to the economic privilege that has been associated with, and become part of, whiteness. In an analysis of how recent American social policies have shaped this conflation of whiteness with privilege entitled *The possessive investment in whiteness: Racialised social democracy and the "white" problem in American studies*, Lipsitz (1995, p.379) has written: "The increased possessive investment in whiteness generated by dis-investment in American's cities, factories, and schools since the 1970s disguises the general problems posed to our society by de-industrialization, economic restructuring, and neoconservative attacks on the welfare state as *racial* problems. It fuels a discourse that demonizes people of color for being victimized by these changes, while hiding the privileges of whiteness by attributing them to family values, fatherhood, and foresight – rather than to favouritism."

In South Africa, the economic privilege inherent in whiteness is more obvious because of the glaringly inequalitarian economic policies established under apartheid. Since the removal of these barriers to South Africans categorised as "non-white", however, a range of more diverse patterns of wealth have become apparent within different groups, including a growing sector of wealthy black businesspeople and a resurgence of so-called "poor whites". Denuded of their previous, legally prescribed material advantage whites in South Africa need to redefine what it means in a material sense to be white, and to reposition themselves within the changing socio-economic

landscape. This chapter examines how WESSAs achieve this redefinition through constructing white culture as “naturally” middle-class while black culture is constructed as ill-fitted to material success, and through elevating the position of economics, a WESSA domain of power, in contrast to politics.

## **5.1 MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES**

Much has been written about the complex relationship between race and class in South Africa (cf. Wolpe, 1988), and while consensus may not exist as to whether South Africa’s struggle was nationalistic or class-based, it is clear that race and class became closely equated through apartheid systems. Although the discourses presented in this chapter do not occur exclusively in WESSA conversation, and may also be adopted by Afrikaans-speakers, they are nonetheless understood here as expressions of WESSA identity as they represent one facet of a multi-faceted group character. The legacy of racially-entrenched class divisions in South Africa provides a point of departure for investigating the economic identity of white English-speaking South Africans.

Hyslop (1999b) has suggested that white South Africans were prepared to accept racial transformation in the early 1990s because their identities had shifted from being primarily racial to being largely based on lifestyle and class considerations. He writes: “a notion of ‘middle class-ness’ was deployed by people brought up within the confines of racial ideology to negotiate the road to desegregation. Racial boundaries began to blur, and commitment to racial ideologies weakened” (p. 5). Indeed, in the texts analysed, most participants defined themselves as middle-class, albeit in most cases upper-middle-class.

Int: The cultures of which you are part, like ...?

Joseph: Ja, definite involvement in, although I don't conform, I definitely, involvement in white, male, student culture. Uh, middle-class, um, a lot of cultural influence from music I think.

Int: To what sort of social class would you say that you belong and why?

Amanda: Probably middle. And, um, why – um ... probably because of, um, education, um ... probably family's income, um, level. Also my parents education levels, um.

Int: Ok, but now you are doing your second degree, aiming at post-graduate degree (laughs). I mean that's probably in the very top level of education in the country.

Amanda: So do you think, are you asking if maybe I feel that I should be in a higher ...?

Int: Ja, maybe. I'm not arguing with you, I'm just interested that you say your education makes you middle-class.

Amanda: I just sort of, my whole life I've thought of myself as being middle-class. I don't really, I can see what would make somebody lower class, but I'm not really, I've always kind of been like, well what makes someone sort of upper or higher class?

Another revealing discourse occurs in the life history of Wendy, who describes moving from South Africa to rural Ireland at an early age.

Wendy: I never felt whack until I moved to Ireland. I always felt like I was very normal, but ... and you know then we moved to Ireland, ok, and then actually, and then I made one friend in class. We were the only two who used to stay in at break time while everyone played Irish sports.

[A few more comments pass]

Int: Why did you two stay in while ...?

Wendy: Well I suppose 'cause I didn't play the sport and he was a sort of, he was a sort of very intelligent, very warm gentle guy, but he didn't play sport either, and he was considered a bit of a nerd. And um, he wasn't, I suppose the truth is in a community like that most people are working-class, and they also have a very, you know they have a whole history of tradition. You know, they've all lived in the same homes for the last seven generations and they all farm cattle for the dairy, and he was, you know his family were, I suppose more, well, they weren't farming community. So I suppose we had a bit more in common already there.

Wendy's representation of herself as feeling out of place in a working-class environment was not due to financial considerations, as she later describes receiving money from charitable organisations after the tragic death of her father. Although she states that her

middle-class status left her feeling out of place in working-class Ireland, Wendy claims that she felt just “normal” in South Africa. Another discourse, which similarly naturalises middle-class values appears in the interview with Harold and Penny Roberts.

Harold: ... if you read things like tours, you know like a cruise in the Carribean or some place, and it says, I don't know, it says twenty-thousand US Dollars. You know, I just look at that and say well there's no ways. I mean, I'll never do that. I'll never get there, never. So they can't be, they can't be worse off overseas can they? 'Cause the people, mister average can afford it over there. We can't, and we're mister average here.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) describe ideology as that which is so taken for granted as to not be noticeable. Harold's self-definition as “mister average”, like Wendy's feeling of being “normal”, reveals middle-class values as part of WESSA ideology.

If white South Africans define themselves more fundamentally in terms of class than race, then one could expect to find discourses incorporating middle- or upper-middle-class individuals from other race groups into constructed collectives with whites in the talk of WESSAs, and indeed these discourses did occur.

Joseph: But I mean, as far as how different they, um, just thinking about (name of a friend). A year and a half ago, I hadn't met her, we spoke on the phone, spoke for quite a while. And then when I met her I was like, oh my God, you're *black*. I had *absolutely* no idea. Because, you know, her personality was just exactly the same.

Int: Hmm. So it's more about like the places you go than ... you talk about the same things.

Jared: Ja, definitely. A lot of people I talk to on the net ... are coloured and black.

Int: So you think that black people, coloured people moving into white, previously white suburbs is going to increase? Um, and how do you feel about it generally in your suburb?

Sarah: I don't have a problem with it as long as they don't bring home a shebeen and make a Khaya in their lounge, you know? I don't have a problem with that.

Int: Ok, so say a black bank manager?

Sarah: No, I don't have a problem with that as long as he's presentable and respectable and he has the same moral issues as I do. And he doesn't have fat parties with all his drunken gabbas from the location.

Bradley: Like we do (laughs). Ja, no, I'm serious. If you live next door to me, then obviously you can afford to live next door to me. You're going to be a very similar type of person. You won't find us going to live in Bishop's Court because we can't afford to. We don't really live that lifestyle. Or us going to live in the location, because we don't ...

Mark: In (daughter's name)'s case she will go to a ... she will go through a schooling process, and if we have our way she will go through a private schooling process, and in that, she will mix with kids of all sorts of races which will actually have similar backgrounds. Because they will go to all the same schools, they will share the same values, dads will drive the same cars, um, aspire to the same things, you know, that sort of thing. And maybe the differences in terms of the racial bias won't be that different, but I think there will be a lot more westernisation of um, our black population, and probably a lot more acceptance of their cultures by us. Which is just happening more and more globally.

The difficulty with class-based integration is apparent in the above extracts. If middle-class status is an ideological position, and is congruent with the ideology of whiteness, then the assimilation of blacks into the middle-class entails an adoption of this ideology. Sarah, for example, accepts urban integration as long as blacks hoping to move to previously white areas "have the same moral issues" as she does, and Mark foresees increasing westernisation of wealthy black South Africans until there is minimal "difference".

The ideological identification of white South Africans with middle-class status could on one hand be taken as a positive sign for the future of racial integration in this country, however it is notable that while this identification allows for the assimilation of blacks into the middle-class, it does not leave discursive room for whites to negotiate the possibility of their not retaining this position of economic privilege. The constructed "normalcy" of whites' current economic position means that a less privileged status for



whites would be construed as “abnormal”. The question therefore arises whether whites are really that open to the shifting of material circumstances along racial lines.

## 5.2 PROTECTING WHITE PRIVILEGE

Int: To what social class would you say you belong and why?  
Sarah: White social class.  
Int: Oh, that's interesting. So you distinguish class as white and black basically?  
Sarah: White and non-white, ja.  
Bradley: Ja, all my friends are white. They're a very different breed, especially when you have a couple of drinks with them and that type of thing. Very much so.  
Charles: No you can't go out and drink with them.  
Sarah: Oooh no.  
Int: Ok, and if you had to say sort of, upper, middle, lower, whatever, so what would you – you're saying whites would be ...?  
Sarah: Middle.  
Int: And blacks would be lower?  
Bradley: Ja, there are a lot of ...  
Sarah: The majority of them are lower, but then you get the ... executive carrots who are ...

Although the above comments may have arisen from a misunderstanding of the meaning of the term “class” in a formal sense, they are perhaps all the more meaningful because of this. In their assessment of class distinctions, Sarah and Bradley cannot see beyond racial divisions that are so entrenched as to be seen as intrinsic to the race groups themselves.

While the discourses in the previous section suggest a degree of class-based racial assimilation, many other discourses appearing in the texts reified and naturalised class divisions along racial lines.

While it is certain that few white South Africans would claim a natural right to privileges in post-apartheid South Africa, subtle discourses that appear in conversation suggest that WESSAs still construct whiteness as a site of justified privilege.

John: Ok, the previous privilege that they used to have because they had a white skin is gone. In fact, it's probably gone beyond what was natural. And they have to battle just that much more to be able to succeed.

Peter: Because only once the uncomfortable period has happened, and after ten years you start getting the reward from those previous ten years filtering through, that the entire economy starts growing better, or starts picking up. Then you'll feel it throughout, because the benefit of those ten years that you've been giving up your job that you would have got, or you know, that sort of stuff, you know.

John claims that white privilege has gone “beyond what was natural”, presumably meaning that he believes whites are discriminated against to an extent in the “new” South Africa. The phrase “what was natural” also serves to construct whites as being *entitled* to some privilege. Peter’s comment demonstrates a similar sense of entitlement. He states that in the short-term whites will have to “give up” jobs that they would otherwise have got. Although it is certain that whites would have got more, or better paying, jobs in the past, the expression “give up” implies sacrifice, that these jobs were a right rather than an unearned and undeserved privilege.

The position of blacks as labourers and servants, on the other hand, is constructed as so natural as to be taken for granted.

Elizabeth: And I think with us, with our children growing up, we had to sort of make sure we *didn't* make them look down on the blacks, but when we were kids the blacks were the servants and that was it. Um ...

Richard: They were the labourers and that was it.

Elizabeth: Ja we never, ever thought oh, you're no good because you're black.

Richard: You know, when I started to work, you know, they were the labourers and you know we were the tradesmen, the office workers and they were the labourers, you know, never even thought of it or anything, that there was a difference.

Int: Um, I suppose all, ja like what I'm getting at, in your case is, is the awareness of being white and understanding of what apartheid was, and how you felt about yourself as white people in a country that had apartheid.

Dawn: Oh, Tess, that awareness didn't real, the reality would have only stuck at 1968, end of my schooling career. Blacks were servants, they were not in my school, there were the odd Chinese, um, there were no blacks.

While much of the selective ignorance described by WESSAs may be seen as a denial of responsibility for the past or, in some cases part of narrative of “coming to one’s senses” and refuting apartheid, it may simultaneously serve to construct black servitude as so normal as to be not worthy of notice.

In the first extract, for example, Richard denies ever having thought that there was “a difference” between black and white people, even though he claims to have noticed that they filled very different positions in the workplace. His description suggests that this division of labour was a natural occurrence because his awareness of this discrepancy is not portrayed as prejudicial, while perceiving “a difference” (presumably a cultural difference) is. In the second extract, Dawn’s statement that she only became aware of apartheid in her late teens because there “were no blacks” directly contradicts her earlier statement that “blacks were servants”. Her comment suggests that only blacks who were *not* servants caused her to question the social situation in South Africa, whereas the presence of blacks servants was never noteworthy.

How should this reification of a racially-grounded class system be understood in conjunction with the discourses of class assimilation in the previous section? Hyslop (1999b) has proposed a possible answer – that white willingness to accept the assimilation of blacks into the middle-class ultimately serves to prevent a breakdown in class boundaries that would allow large numbers of poor blacks to enter previously white social and economic domains. A wide range of arguments appearing in the texts substantiate Hyslop’s proposal: discourses were strategically employed by WESSAs to demonstrate the unsuitability of blacks assimilating into the middle-class in large numbers, and in so doing to protect white material privilege. Many of these discourses

were based on cultural assumptions about what it means to be black or white in South Africa, and thus relate closely to whiteness as an ideological position.

The first strategy that whites employed to de-legitimise the accumulation of wealth by blacks, was the portrayal of capitalism and materialism as 'un-African'.

- John: But I think, ja. But you see, what you're saying now is true, because if you're talking about, if you had the same education and you were black *now*, you're in between, you're neither fish nor fowl. And the black people will ostracise you because they think you're something funny and you think you're (unclear).
- Antonia: You think you're a white man. A white wannabe, that's what my black friends call it. You're a white wannabe.
- Richard: Uh, the black, there's a lot of them that are very well educated and they don't put on the airs that those that are partly educated try to put on, and try to do everything. That, that they uh, how can I put it, they make fools of themselves, and yet they walk around with their noses in the air to the rest of the blacks. You know they are trying to live up to the Joneses in the English way. The blacks are trying to live to the standards of the higher, wealthy whites, and they're not in that class in my personal opinion. They're not of that class yet. They *might* get there, but it'll take many generations.

In both of the above extracts, wealth and education are constructed as "white" traits, and blacks who become wealthy or educated are portrayed as "trying to be white" rather than trying to be middle-class. This "unnaturalness" is substantiated in the first extract by Antonia, who claims that this is how her black friends perceive the situation as well. Her claim serves to justify her position as objective rather than only a white perspective. A similar construction occurs in the following extract.

- Christine: There's a big difference between getting frustrated with a drunken scummy person that's wandering down the road causing kack, and like having a go at them. They may be black, but no-one's saying that they are – that that *is* black people. There's a huge difference in generalisation there.
- Matthew: And then you get upper class black people who try so hard to be white.
- Christine: Ja.
- Int: That's actually one of my questions. Like, what do you think of like, the black elite, black upper-class and black upper middle-class?
- Christine: I think it's sad.
- Matthew: Ja, I think they're putting up a façade just to ...

Christine: They're putting us on a pedestal. They're trying to be like us, saying that we are better. So they're basically playing out the role that was enforced on them in the first place, instead of working their way up being who they need to be, the way they want to be, and making their status in the world.

Matthew and Christine's rhetoric suggests that it is not in the best interests of blacks to become wealthy and upper-middle class, that being in this social class denies blacks the opportunity of "working their way up being who they need to be". In all these discourses, being white and privileged is considered perfectly natural, but to be black and in a similar economic situation is not.

A second strategy employed to condemn blacks who achieve materially relates to the discourses of individualism discussed in the previous chapter. While whites are constructed as highly individualised, blacks are represented as communal and their individual achievements are denounced as "selfish" or hypocritical.

Penny: I think the ones who've got too much too fast, um ... go overboard and then they don't worry about anything else. They just worry about ...

Harold: The rest.

Penny: ...Themselves. So they're not actually doing what they're supposed to be doing by helping other people to achieve what they ...

Peter: I'm not sure it's that easy to contribute. It takes quite proactive, quite a proactive person to actually go out. Because you have to make, you actually have to go out and want to help.

Int: Ok, now we're talking about white South Africans. What about a black South African who was taking a job?

Peter: It's the same thing, and I think a black South African who isn't contributing, a lot of the time I think it's even worse, because a lot of the times they can actually identify with the people who need the help more.

Dawn: I still don't think a middle class is developing. I think that the one's that were quite well off are now super-rich.

Antonia: Super rich, ja.

John: Well they are capitalists there's no question about it.

Dawn: But they're doing nothing to pull up their fellow black man. It's just like whoohoo.

Penny claims that wealthy black people are “supposed” to be “helping other people”, and Peter states that blacks not contributing to helping others in South Africa is “worse” than whites doing the same thing. While blacks are constructed as hypocritical if they do not commit themselves to assisting *all* other blacks, what is expected for whites is in sharp contrast.

Int: Ok, um what do you think is the role of white English-speaking South Africans in the country today?

Dawn: Well we're not nannies any more. As in *promoting, looking after, fighting for their rights*. The underdog's rights or anything else is like, whitt. It's over to you now. I think a lot of the white English speaking saw himself as, as a voice for the underdog, as a voice for the people that had no vote, um, whatever, whatever. Um ... now I think it's, just part of the hotchpotch. Everyone for his own now.

[A few more comments pass]

John: Yes, now it's survival. And it's the same as Ian in his tech. situation. He's got to survive. He's got to get his own best marks, regardless of everybody else.

Antonia: I've got to promote myself in the work world.

Individualistic achievement is considered perfectly justifiable for whites, whereas for blacks, it is condemned on the grounds that it is not sufficiently communally oriented.

Brookhiser,(1997) in an article entitled *The way of the WASP* has broken down the character to which WASP's aspire into six identifiable traits: conscience, antisensuality, industry, use, success and civic-mindedness, his analysis resting on Weber's theory of the Protestant work ethic. While not all WESSAs are Protestants (although many or even most could trace *some* Protestantism in their lineage) vestiges of a discourse of the Protestant work ethic remain in their talk today, and may be used to denounce the integration of blacks into the workplace.

Bradley: I've got a friend that's in the navy, it's a very perfect example. And when the, the English people, the white people had Christmas, the Moslems and whatever wanted to have Christmas, when their holidays come along they also want to have their holidays. And this is causing a **major** problem in the defence force in this country, not just the navy, but all of the defence forces.

Charles: He told us this story, this one guy, I don't know, went away for initiation or whatever and he put in leave of, what was it? Three weeks or something. And six weeks later he came back, and I don't care about if they, this bloke's in the navy as well, they don't care if they've gone AWOL or whatever, they're just busy with their initiation. That's to them more important than ...

Sarah: ...their job, their livelihood.

Charles: I won't say, I wouldn't say that's just a job, you know, that's government, that's ...

Bradley: It's their career, it's their income.

Penny: But it's not only that. When it comes to like the cops, like you said what about the cops? I think, and I don't know how you can fit it, it's the nurses are the same, to them it's a job, it's not um, a dedication. You don't have the same sort of sense of responsibility for the jobs that you're doing. Do you know what I mean?

Int: MmHm.

Penny: Um, because I mean, (daughter's name) sees it with the nurses all the time. They're just there for a job, and they don't have that ethical sense that nurses used to have. You know, when you went into nursing you were totally dedicated. You did it not just because it was a job, because that, because you had this vocation almost to become a nurse, and so you really gave everything and you had ethics and total responsibility to that job. Whereas the nurses now don't have that. They're just there for the money and you know, they couldn't give a damn about the patient or anything else. They're not interested.

While in the first extract both civic-minded responsibility and material reward are represented as being abused by blacks, who are portrayed as unsuited in all ways to regular employment, in the second extract the alleged lack of responsibility and dedication is constructed as selfish and materialistic. Whereas whites are portrayed as working for the good of all, blacks are characterised as simply seeking as much money as possible without demonstrating any of the traits Brookhiser identifies as WASPish virtues.

While the above analysis by no means covers all the rhetorical strategies used to exclude blacks from the world of capitalist enterprise and success, it demonstrates that

discourses of whiteness may be applied by WESSAs towards this goal. The employment of these discourses is dually related to WESSA identity, firstly because they rely on constructions of whiteness and blackness to make their argument, and secondly because they seek to protect the privileged position of whites in South African society. These discourses thus draw on, and feed back into, what it means to be a white English-speaking South African today.

### 5.3 ECONOMICS VERSUS POLITICS

One point on which most authors on the subject of white English-speaking South African identity have agreed is the group's affinity for business and their substantial contribution towards the development of South Africa's economy (cf. Butler, 1976; Sparks, 1990). In the interviews conducted, WESSAs similarly constructed themselves as an economically-orientated group.

- Dawn: Well I think the economy is still in the hands of the white elite.  
Antonia: Ja.  
Dawn: The Afrikaner got a handle on it to some extent.  
Antonia: And ... for some reason it doesn't bother us that perhaps black people are racist or coloured people are racist, or Indian people are racist towards us, because we're ok, because we're still on top there.
- Int: Do you think that there is a specific culture of white English-speaking South Africans?  
Mark: Mmmm. It's the Harry Openheimer culture.  
Int: (laughs) You'll have to elaborate on that one.  
Mark: I don't know, I think the Anglo-American, um, the culture is a very much, an economic-based, eurocentric ... (interruption).

In the literature on WESSA identity, this proclivity for business is often attributed to, or used to account for, WESSAs' reputed lack of political interest. The group's otherwise



inexplicable political apathy is accounted for by their lack of political power due to numerical minority, even though they possess greater economic power. The texts revealed many similar claims. When white English-speaking South Africans discuss their economic strength, it is frequently in association with a discussion regarding politics, the aim of which is to contrast the two.

Int: How do you think the political changes in South Africa have influenced the politics of white English-speaking South Africans?

Mark: I don't think it's influenced the politics of white English-speaking South Africans generally, because I don't think white English-speaking South Africans are political by nature.

[A few more comments pass] Apathetic. We're very apathetic in terms of our political destiny, because we ... I think white English-speaking South Africans see their security of future in the economic stability, and that's why they are so good at moving elsewhere. Because they don't get involved in the political mess, they get out and make tom. That's why they can live in Dubai and do it there, and then they can go and live in Oz. They can live anywhere in the world and be successful.

Int: What about your parents' generation and that kind of thing? (enquiring about politics)

Christine: Well my father doesn't really give two hoots.

Int: Did he ever give two hoots?

Christine: Well he was worried about it at one point when the situation was quite bad as it was, whatever. But um, he's never been like, interested in what's going on – he's just been wanting to know that the country's going to be ok.

Matthew: Mostly just worried about the economy.

While politics and economics obviously share a close relationship, as material experiences may strongly influence political inclinations, and as political intentions may dictate which economic decisions are made, WESSA discourse often serve to construct the two as opposing forces.

Int: Ok, so, in terms of getting things right, you believe for example that job creation through entrepreneurship is a main priority. What else do you think we need to do to get things right in this country?

Peter: Well I imagine that from my perspective everything originally stems from economics. Basically that's the way it is. When people are well off, then all sorts of things start rectifying themselves. When, when a country is not, is not poor then suddenly the crime starts drying up. So basically, one thing I feel strongly about is minimum wage. I'm one hundred percent positive about that. Minimum wage should be going because all that is doing at the moment is causing unemployment. You know you may get people living off substandard salaries, but at least you wouldn't have a forty percent unemployment rate. Ja, so, getting people employed and building a strong economy. And thinking longer term than what the politicians have ... are forced to think. You know, because they've got to sit there and rectify, or try and get the next vote for the next four years. They, they pander to economic decisions that aren't good for the long-term.

Int: And the, um, your dad's concerns about political involvements?

Karl: He didn't really notice anything happening here. I did come home occasionally with funny ideas, but ... ja he didn't really say anything about that, and he didn't see it. Also, again the engineers on upper campus didn't really have time, physically time to do that, because the curriculum was very packed. At least in my days, I don't know what it's changed like now, but we didn't have all that much free time. So, it was you go to varsity and you get your degree. And, the other people on campus had lots of time to toyi-toyi and burn tyres and go on marches and that kind of thing. Especially on the social sciences side.

Int: Hey!

Karl: Ok, well they seemed to be the ones that were doing it. Ok, they're also a bit more sensitised to the needs of people, ok, so...it's more likely that that would be the grouping. But I didn't notice that the people who were doing law were involved in that kind of thing. They were also probably too busy trying to get their degree. Um, the kind of thing you also no...well that I noticed at varsity. Being you know in sort of the social sciences as opposed to the sciences, which we sort of termed the sort of softer options on that side of varsity. A lot of the people were very naïve about how the real world works.

Peter feels that an economic solution would provide the best answer to South Africa's problems, but that politics, in effect, interferes with the development of economic interventions. Karl, on the other hand, claims that those who are involved in the pursuit of material success do not have the time to get involved in political activity as they are too focussed on the "real world". Not only are economics and politics pitted against each other in these constructions, but economics is presented as a far more important avenue of social endeavour, and one which is more likely to solve social ills.

Economics, in the above discourses, refers specifically to *capitalist* economic principles, and corporate business is constructed as both vital on a structural level, and as a legitimate tool for alleviating South Africa's racial tensions.

- Int: Ok, how is your sense of ethnicity, or your sense of identity, or whatever different to that of your parents?
- Joseph: Very, very different.  
[A few more statements pass]
- Int: So you disagree with them on a lot of issues?
- Joseph: No, because they're kind of, they're slowly migrating towards being liberal, but, um, that's really through the workplace, you know. Having black colleagues now, that's their only real ... Dammit.
- Mark: It's those, particularly the women that end up house wives don't socialise and integrate with people of different cultures because they stay within their own comfort zone, social circle. So they don't spend time at work meeting Muslims, uh Jews, blacks whites, Indians, coloureds ... the whole trip. So they're not exposed to it, don't understand it, don't understand that they're actually cool people, and I think the workplace is probably going to be one of the biggest drivers to social reform in this country. And I think it's a critical part of it, that's why this, the more people that are employed and integrated into the, the sort of workforce and into that, the more we will start accepting people.

In contrast to the social good that capitalism is constructed as bringing to society, politics is denounced as hypocritical and useless.

- Henry: The bribery and corruption has not changed. It's only the colour who controls it has changed, that's all that's happened.
- Int: So do you feel that people who are going to be in positions of, sort of administrative power are ... those positions actually *draw* a corrupt kind of person regardless of what ...
- Michelle: *Absolutely*.  
[A few more comments pass]
- Ja, but then you get all these politicians that really make such arseholes out of themselves. Um, you know, but then you think, my goodness me, you know. How can *those* people be running our country?
- Int: But now black people we're talking about here?
- Michelle: And white.
- Henry: Politicians, politicians.
- Michelle: Ja, politicians.
- Henry: And that goes throughout the whole world. They're a bunch of bloody liars, the whole lot of them. They lie, and lie, and convince ...

Int: Or like the black elite? I suppose in Joburg you see more like, wealthy black people you know.

Amanda: Sometimes it's a bit of a shock (laughs). I don't know why. I ha ... even this morning I was walking across University Avenue and I saw this black guy driving a maroon Mercedes Benz and I'm like, whoo, where did you get that one from? Um ... sometimes, I don't know, 'cause my parents have all these ideas about these, you know, black MPs, and they're always going on about how they do nothing and they just sit there and they drive these fancy, whatever cars and stuff like that. And so sometimes those little views kind of come to me.

In both extracts, politics is presented as a field that provides an opportunity for corrupt individuals to become very wealthy while making very little difference to society. In the face of the “real” work that WESSAs claim is necessary, politics is constructed simply as time-wasting.

Dawn: Just so long as the country works, and so long as someone is fixing the potholes, and so long as hospitals are ok, and they're not at the moment. It's not on a, on a cultural or a ...

John: Well it's partly on a cultural basis, because I think Anglo-Saxons generally speaking are not fanatical about anything.

Dawn: Ja, ja, ja. But there's no ...

John: And when it comes to politics and somebody else is prepared to do it, well then get on with it, you know what I mean.

Dawn: Yes, but, but stick to the basics of making the country run. I'm not into some fervent, um ... sort of, what's the word, like some fervour, some belief, some whatever. [a few more statements pass]. But it's not, it's not, it's nothing to do with the philosophy now. It's nothing to do with a belief system. It's nothing like that. They've *all* got their rights now, we must all just look at the potholes and get on with it.

In this excerpt, politics is constructed as unnecessary, rather than something that permeates all social interactions on a daily basis. Dawn claims that politics should be based only on administrative concerns now that apartheid is over. Her statement constructs a reality in which administration of resources is not governed by any form of ideology, but rather is common to all people. This is a reality in which the ideals of those in power are obscured as they masquerade as “for the common good”.

A further discourse that reveals this WESSA ideological myopia is that politics is something towards which one has an inclination or not, rather like a personality trait. As being politicised is represented as a personal choice, politics is constructed as only affecting the lives of some, and not of others.

- Penny: I don't think about politics. I think they're all...
- Harold: Ja. I don't get involved anyway because I'm not a politician. I'm just, but I, I don't know. Ja, I think they've sort of, they haven't done a *bad* job, the ANC. You know, there's no-one who can do a better job.
- Christine: I don't know. I wasn't, I didn't want much to do with politics. I was just noticing that, like, the limitations on the racial aspect were letting up and that was a good thing. But there was obviously a lot of violence and that, which was not surprising. You suppress people for a long time and their anger's got to blow at some point.
- Int: Matthew, what do you think?
- Matthew: I can't remember now (laughs). Um ... it didn't really affect *me*. I just carried on doing anything that I would normally do.

Harold's claim that "I don't get involved anyway because I'm not a politician" serves to sequester politics from ordinary life in the same way that Matthew's statement that political changes did not affect him personally does. To claim that one does not have politics is tantamount to claiming that one does not have a culture – both aim at presenting oneself as "neutral", "impartial" and hence able to make "objective" decisions that will be "for the good of all". De-emphasising both one's inclination towards, and the importance of, politics therefore relates closely to discourses of whiteness as they have been identified by foreign authors.

Downplaying the importance of party politics, an arena in which WESSAs are notoriously weak, allows for WESSAs to promote social institutions that *do* encapsulate their ideology – an ideology of privileged whiteness, and of capitalist economics. One institution well suited to promoting these interests is corporate business, and the

vilification of politics may be used by WESSAs to present business as a viable alternative to politics as a social regulator. The promotion of economics over politics, combined with self-representation as “economically oriented”, serves to advance WESSAs collective interests and ultimately to protect their material and social standing in South Africa.

University of Cape Town

## CHAPTER 6

### EUROCENTRIC DISCOURSES

#### 6.1 EUROPEAN – BUT STILL SOUTH AFRICAN

A common criticism of white English-speaking South Africans, especially before the early 1980s when more pressing political concerns became dominant, was their continued commitment to Europe, Britain in particular, and the concurrent lack of South African nationalism that accompanied this (Garson, 1976). As many WESSAs today are second, third or fourth generation South Africans it is unlikely that the same jingoistic loyalty to Britain will be found in their talk, however on a cultural level, Europe and/or the west are some of the few ethnic markers with which WESSAs do specifically identify themselves.

John: So what's our culture?  
Ian: I don't know.  
Antonia: I don't know.  
Ian: I *cannot*, I don't think any of us can put our finger on it.  
Dawn: It's got *bits* of the western world.  
Antonia: *Bits* of everything.

Jared: Um ... while I'm a student whose culture is very western, um, um, there's a lot of American influence in South Africa, um, actually, I do, I do adhere to that quite a bit.

Int: Ok, the first question is, can you describe your culture for me?  
Richard: Mmmmm.  
Elizabeth: (laughs) Oh deary. I hope they're not all as difficult as this.  
Int: Everyone finds them difficult.  
Elizabeth: I wouldn't even know how to start. Hmmm.  
Richard: I don't know (coughs).  
Elizabeth: I suppose pretty much European.  
Int: Ok. You agree?  
Richard: Yes I agree there.  
Elizabeth: I suppose that's also got something to do with us having ... our ancestors or whatever.  
Richard: Yes, ancestors, hereditary, coming from more from Europe than ... that's, you know not many South Africans as South Africans were.

Richard's final comment that "not many South Africans as South Africans were" had a European background illustrates the purpose of this group identification as European or western. While WESSAs are constructed as similar to westerners (particularly the British, Americans and Australians) other groups of South Africans are constructed as culturally "different" to these groups.

Int: And, um, just sort of in social terms, do you think it's easy for white South Africans to emigrate?

Peter: That would be also easier. I imagine as in like, as in adapting to the society they move to. It would be easier I imagine, because ... a large portion of the white South Africans, as I say, have the European background. So anywhere in Europe is, effectively you understand the culture better, you understand the humour, the whatever else, you know. You have like a connection to the thing. A large portion of South Africans do have a connection to those bits. Or Australia is, is still very similar. The white Australian life is very similar, is very similar to the white South African life, and you can sort of go there and socially adapt and find new friends and you connect and that sort of stuff.

[A few more comments pass]

You know we talk to some of the guys at work, and these are, once again, privileged black guys who've lived a large amount of their life either overseas or, you know, in high income areas and stuff like that. Their culture is **remarkably** different to mine. It's, it's, you know, they still go back to maybe the homeland every year, to perform a ceremony which involves the cutting up of a goat or something. You know it's remarkably different. You know the, so for them to go to Europe it's going to take a lot more work to actually fit in.

Int: Interesting that you say we've been brought up white, as in like that there's a culture of being white?

Richard: There's certainly a culture of being white.

Int: Not just a skin colour. Ok, so can you explain to me what that's about?

Richard: That goes back to what we've discussed previously with the European culture coming in and you know, that's more of the culture as we do not know what the African culture is or we've stuck more to the European culture, way of ...

Int: But then, um, you were saying how Afrikaans people were not so European.

Richard: Ja.

Elizabeth: Yes. I think that most of them aren't. They don't think the same way as people who have ancestors from overseas you know.



The concept of “European culture” as it is used in both of the above extracts is reductionist. It is constructed as homogenous rather than pluralistic, and as Shohat and Stam (1994) explain, ignores the African and Asian contributions to European civilisations. Despite the fact that no particulars of this generic “European” culture are advanced, White English-speaking South Africans are constructed as having privileged access to it even in comparison to Afrikaners. In Peter’s claim, for example, a white South African who has never lived in Europe, would be more “European” than a black South African who grew up there.

While the above dialogue demonstrates that WESSAs do construct their group identity as bearing a continued connection to Europe and the west, in the texts that were analysed there also existed a discourse of concerted “South African-ness”, which in many cases served to denounce rhetorically any criticism of the group as “unpatriotic”. Richard and Elizabeth’s conversation above, for example, continues as follows:

- Int: But then, um, you were saying how Afrikaans people were not so European.
- Richard: Ja.
- Elizabeth: Yes. I think that most of them aren’t. They don’t think the same way as people who have ancestors from overseas you know.
- Richard: Ja, as I said, the generation gaps you know, from their um, roots coming from Europe to ours, there are so many generations in between. They have gone.
- Elizabeth: It doesn’t go away from the fact that we’re still very proud to be South Africans does it?
- Richard: No it doesn’t.

Richard and Elizabeth are concerned to demonstrate that while they feel WESSAs are culturally European, this in no way forms an impediment to their South African-ness. Other discourses appearing in the texts also served to construct WESSAs as “legitimately” South African.

Int: Ok, how important is being South African to you and why?  
 Henry: It's very important. It's a lekker place this.  
 Michelle: I'd say it's a *unique* country.  
 Henry: The scenery, the climate, everything.  
 Michelle: Ja, and I just can't see us living in a different country other than here. You often wonder why so many people *are* leaving the country, you know, that they can't stand it any more. And if they're really happy. Where will they go to? Will they really make a success of their lives there?

Int: Do you feel that we need some acceptance from the black population? That we need to do something, like, like commit to assisting to be legitimately belonging to this country?

Peter: I think it's, it's, you know there's one thing that irritates me is that a white South African, you know, I'm not automatically viewed as South African to a sense, overseas or wherever. You're still kind of seen as a *white* South African. You're not automatically a South African, which is kind of what you're saying. And I don't think it, the belonging doesn't have to be *bestowed* by the black community, or the foreign community, but it has to be, you know, a sense of yourself. You know, in yourself do you realise, do you actually, do you actually want this country to be better. Do you love this country enough to fight for it?

Michelle demonstrates her commitment to South Africa by stating that "I just can't see us living in a different country other than here", claiming an exclusive sense of nationalism. Peter constructs WESSA legitimacy in South Africa by claiming to be "irritated" when white South Africans are not automatically considered South African. He further iterates his point by constructing nationality as that which stems from inside an individual and that all one has to do in order to legitimately belong to a nation is to *feel* that one belongs. These justifications are important in protecting the legitimacy and place of whites in Africa. The question thus arises: if it is vital to WESSAs to construct themselves as truly South African, why do they nonetheless continue to construct themselves as linked to Europe and the west rather than immersing themselves fully in an African identity?

## 6.2 EUROCENTRIC DIFFUSIONISM

Advances in communications technologies over the past century have meant the beginning of the era of globalisation. Politically and economically, countries are becoming more reliant on each other, and the pace of these international interactions has prompted increased academic discourse on the topics of “postcoloniality” and “multiculturalism” as different cultures come into confrontation with each other on a daily basis. Amid these apparently positive moves in social theory, some authors are critical that, rather than allowing for greater diversity, these theories may be obscuring global hegemonies, which need to be exposed (cf. Miyoshi, 1993).

These hegemonies bear a variety of titles that are virtually synonymous – the west, the first world, modernised or industrialised nations, the anglo-cluster and international business. While all names do not refer to exactly the same group of individuals or organisations, they are generally used to refer to Europe and some of its previous colonies (particularly those that are largely in the hands of whites), and to certain powerful institutions within these nations – notably capitalistic institutions. For authors such as Miyoshi (1993), the era of globalisation heralds a victory for these powers, an ultimate triumph of colonialism, rather than a long-overdue opportunity for marginalised groups to participate in international politics.

Against this backdrop the answer to the question: why do WESSAs continue to define themselves as linked to Europe? becomes more apparent. To position one’s group as linked to these powerful collectives serves to buy into their power. As WESSAs constitute such a minority in South Africa, constructing themselves as culturally similar to these outsiders, promotes their power in contrast to other groups *within* the country.

While several strands of discourse appearing in the texts related to the rising capabilities of South Africa and South Africans in comparison to other nations, which serves a clear purpose in promoting South Africans *outside* of the country, there also appeared a strand of discourse which took 'the west' as a reference point to which South Africans should direct themselves.

Harold: The Muslims and the Hindus and they all, they don't like each other here.

Penny: Well I ... ja.

Harold: They don't, I can tell you. I see it in business. I know. They don't. But I mean the whites, we've got a distinct, a big advantage. You look at where it is in the world isn't it. It's in the white run countries.

[A few more comments pass]

Anywhere in the world you won't, you don't pitch up in London and go and park yourself next to Heathrow airport where there's a bit of vacant sand and put a tin shack up. It doesn't work like that.

Amanda: I think a lot of, a lot of people kind of see American culture as an idea ... as an ideal culture. Maybe something to try and attain. Um, just with you know, television and (unclear) American television.

Int: So quite a consumer society, is that what you're trying to say?

Amanda: Ja, just kind of American fashion standards and ... um, ja, whatever comes out of America is seen as cool and the thing to do and ...

Int: And, what do you think about that? Do you agree? Do you disagree?

Amanda: It's always kind of, um ... because I feel that, especially from my father, who wishes that he was American.

Int: Really? (laughs) Why is that?

Amanda: Yes ... because he sees it as a free country, and it's, you know as I was saying earlier, opportunities are greater and you know, everything's cheaper, and ... uh.

Amanda's overt claims regarding the desirability of American ideology are reflected in Harold's more subtle statement that one can't simply erect a settlement on someone else's property "Anywhere in the world ... it doesn't work like that". His implication is that South Africans are violating world standards to which we should be adhering.

The notion that certain areas of the world are the initiators of development, and that others progress by adopting these developments is known as "diffusionism", and

discourses that construct the initiating areas as Europe and its former colonies have been termed discourses of Eurocentric diffusionism (Blaut, 1993). Blaut writes that:

“Europeans are seen as the ‘makers of history.’ Europe eternally advances, progresses, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is ‘traditional society.’ Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical center and a permanent periphery: an Inside and an Outside. Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates” (1993, p.1).

The concept of a normal “direction of progress” towards western ideals, encompasses a hierarchical scale of development, beginning with ‘non-western’ and ending with ‘western’. While politically correct discourse of the moment in South Africa would likely prohibit overt claims of European superiority, tacit discussions of “development” and “progress” in the talk of WESSAs is evidence of discourses of Eurocentric diffusionism at work.

Int: What do you think about the role of white English-speaking South Africans in the country today?

Bradley: Very much so. I'll say the leaders with the experience, the knowledge.

Charles: They might be in the background.

Bradley: Ja. And the black man has accepted it. I mean you look at a lot of African countries where the black man has taken over, South West Africa's an example. I mean they, the black man was there a year, it's happening in Rhodesia. The black man came in and it destroyed the country. Our black man has been in power now for seven years, and ... I wouldn't really say the country has destroyed itself if you compare the way it's happened in other African countries, *because* the white man has stood up for himself in this country. We can still go to the garage and get petrol. We can still go to the cafe and buy the local cigarettes or whatever. In a lot of African countries where the black man has taken over there is nothing left. We're still building the country up, they're still developing here, developing there.

Harold: You know, I don't know. I reckon if you sort of start going up through Zimbabwe and then you get to Zambia and then Tanzania and Kenya and I don't know. But you go, as you go up there you'll find less and less, 'cause there's no places for me, unless you want to live in a mud hut and go backwards. Then you can do it.

Sue: It's just another debate whether black culture actually wanted to be westernised, because they'll have to be westernised now because that's the way they're going to cope in this environment. But actually at the end of the day, maybe they would have been happier living in their colonialist ...

The undisguised racism that appears in the first extract conflates a Eurocentric discourse of development with racial identity in South Africa. Whites are portrayed as the “developers” and blacks as “destroyers”. In the second extract Harold poses a similar construction, claiming that there is no place for whites in Africa unless they want to “go backwards” along a continuum of development on which black cultures are placed lower than white ones. The third extract is less overtly racist. Sue laments that blacks are going to “have to be westernised” now because that is the only way that they will “cope” with the modern world. The implication is that African cultures are simply not strong or relevant enough to be competitive with western cultures.

Discourses of social “development” tie closely in to the discourses of “norms and standards” described in Chapter four. The standards to which WESSAs refer are based on Eurocentric values and norms, such that the Africanisation of an institution is seen as a “lowering of standards”.

Int: Ok, no you've actually spoken about some of these, um, but what are the specific major challenges facing white English-speaking South Africans in the near future?

Richard: (coughs). The first thing I think is uh, white South Africans, um, must train the Africans and keep them at a level. Keep them up with the, parallel to the whites.

Bradley: Because we've been accepted into ... and also the white man has joined their parties.

Charles: Ja.

Bradley: With the white man's knowledge and experience to bring *up* their parties.

Charles: Their standard, how can I put it, their standard of thinking, and their standard of organising, and uh, doing things.

While the above two extracts are both explicitly racist and eurocentric, many other discourses in the talk of WESSAs which are less explicit achieve the same effect.

Int: Ok, so what do you think the role is of white English-speaking people in South Africa today?

Christine: To learn and spread our knowledge.

Int: To learn and spread our knowledge?

Christine: Ja, we do have a lot of access to a lot of information out there, and I think we must start learning things in a positive way, and not being judgemental, and ... and just, ja, spread, teach, discuss.

Int: And what do you see as the future for white English-speaking South Africans in this country?

Henry: Shew. I think we have a role to play here. We, um, still have to uplift the black people, very much so. But I think the, the black people need to accept us better as well.

These discourses play cleverly into anti-apartheid discourses that reject the deliberate under-skilling of black South Africans, and nationalistic discourses that claim a commitment to the country through service. While on one level these discourses claim to be promoting the interests of black South Africans, they simultaneously serve to claim that whites' access to global knowledge systems allows them to "know the way" that needs to be taken by blacks. This validates the co-option of blacks into western culture where they may compete with, but never fully surpass, whites, who are represented as having a privileged relationship to the culture in question.

This integration into westernism relates to Hyslop's argument, discussed in the previous chapter, that white South Africans are eager to co-opt a limited number of blacks into their cultural arenas in order to solidify class boundaries and ultimately prevent large scale racial transformation that could threaten their material interests. Ndebele (1987, p.14 – 15) expresses a similar reservation towards white discourses of transformation. He writes that: "The opening up of white private schools, for example, is

a good illustration of the strategy of containment through absorption. [...] What is common to all these diverse interests? It is the unquestioned, nonnegotiable primacy of western civilization and its spectrum of values embodied in what has been called free enterprise and the special kind of democracy based on it. [...] it should be clear then that much of the talk about reform and change from the point of view of white South Africa in general is premised not on what the whites of South Africa may have to unlearn, but on what black people, those “prospective citizens of the Republic”, need to be speedily introduced to so that they can become “responsible” citizens of the future, so that they can become westerners in black skins.”

Far from constructing western influence as oppressive, however, WESSAs in fact construct it as liberating. The following excerpt, for example, is taken from a discussion following Mark’s claim that Cape Town has been the intellectual capital of South Africa due to its greater contact with Europe.

- Int: Ok, but I mean, obviously at that time, Cape Town, there was a port and there was a lot more interaction, but now, I mean, with e-mails and telephones and all that there’s a lot more ...
- Mark: E-mails are only how old? Ten years ago? And we’ve only been embracing it five years.
- Int: And TV and all those things that have given us access – more direct access to overseas.
- Mark: Oh, and I think all that is part of what liberated the country. Liberated ...’cause liberation only came through liberation of mind, so the Afrikaners became more enlightened. The white South Africans – the English-speaking white South Africans became less sort of less afraid of losing what they had.
- Henry: Ja, but um, the Afrikaans, again, they’re so narrow-minded, um, that if they, they’re so *uninformed* because they stick with just what is South African, South African music, and culture and all that, and they, they’re not open, they, you know, people from Europe are so much more open, and changes and things take place so much easier there whereas it does here. They’re really narrow-minded.



In Mark's statement, it was European influence that actually brought about an end to apartheid. This one-sided argument ignores the fact that it was colonisation that *caused* it in the first place. Interestingly, in both excerpts, "European" influence is contrasted with Afrikaans culture, despite the European origins of the Afrikaners. While "Europeans", presumably the English, are constructed as liberal and forward-thinking, Afrikaners are constructed as in need of "enlightenment" through this European influence. These statements introduce the importance of the English language in the construction of white English-speaking South African identity.

### 6.3 WHITENESS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Crapanzano (1985) points out that it is language above anything else that for white English-speaking South Africans maintains a bridge between South Africa and Europe, whereas for the Afrikaans it does not. This linguistic link with Europe, however, is not only important for white English-speaking South Africans as a matter of heritage; analysis revealed that WESSAs construct English as providing access to a "global" community.

- Antonia: You're kind of forced to speak English if you want to communicate internationally if you're not English-speaking. You always have to have English as your second or third language.
- John: Well personally I think to be born English-speaking is a privilege no matter where you are.
- Dawn: Language is the biggest spoken here by a *long* chalk.
- John: Well besides that, I mean, it is the language that's used most.
- Dawn: Well I suppose except for Mandarin or something, but whatever, I can't class them 'cause they're not one of our ...
- John: But I mean, I'm talking about geographically. Even in, even in China they use English as a, as a business medium.
- Dawn: They want to be part of the international community.
- [A few more comments pass]
- Ian: I'm not talking about the near future. I'm talking about the far future. I mean, eventually English is going to become probably ninety percent

universal around the world. And if you don't speak it, I'm sorry, you ... I think Afrikaans is just one of the ones that is going to get wiped out.

- Int: But how important to you is being English-speaking and why?
- Harold: Well English-speaking is ... when I went across to Taiwan, you know, all the Taiwanese are desperate to learn English. They're all, I mean they can speak English, a lot of them, but they want to get perfect, perfect. They'll never get, I mean, it's a hard language to learn. We know, we were fortunate again because we just grew up with it. So it's, if you want to get, English is world-wide isn't it?
- Penny: It's easier to be able to communicate in *most* places that you go to. I mean even watching CNN and those Afghanis ... Afghani people, you know. Quite a few of them come out with English. So I think they would be more likely to speak English than one of the European languages or one of the African languages or whatever, you know. People tend to *want* to speak it more than anything else.
- Harold: Being able to speak Zulu isn't going to help you too much in the world. You know, when you've gotta, we're part of the world. We're not just a little place down here. It's not like Rhodesia with sanctions where it doesn't matter. Now you've gotta deal with the world. English has got to be the answer.

In the above extracts, English is represented as a “world-wide” language, as the language of the “international community”, and as a “universal” language. The dominance of English is constructed as an inevitability when Ian states that “English is going to become probably ninety percent universal around the world” and Harold claims that “English has got to be the answer”. No possibility is allowed for the development of multilingualism amongst native English-speakers as an alternative.

For WESSAs, this dominance ensures the security of their collective place within South Africa. If “English has got to be the answer” globally, then it is up to the English-speakers within this country to connect South Africa to the world. Another related way in which English is constructed as powerful is through its relationship to international and local business.

- Michelle: I think today, if you can't speak English you will not be successful in business. Um, ja, that would be the main thing. Uh ... do you want to add something more to that?
- Henry: Ja, I agree, it is a universal language, and therefore it is imperative that you do know the language, because *all* books and what have you at universities and all that is written in English. That is the language. You've to know English.
- [A few more comments pass]
- Michelle: So your prospects speaking English is just that much greater. I mean, if you take a raw Afrikaner and a bilingual, English-speaking South African, and they apply for the same job, boy-oh-boy, the one that's more conversant or fluent in English will get that job, definitely.
- Henry: All business takes place in English in any case. It's only in very small communities out in the country that you would have the Afrikaans getting along with each other.
- Int: Ja.
- Henry: But the minute they have to contact head office, which is in the big city or something, then they've got no option but to go to English.
- Int: How important is being English and why?
- Dawn: That's interesting.
- Antonia: In South Africa?
- Dawn: The best.
- Ian: Ja, the best. I would hate to be a Dutchman (all laugh).
- Dawn: But it's, it's the financial language, it's international, and again, if they can't understand you, you just shout at them a little louder (all laugh).

This constructed link between English, business and globalisation echoes the discussion thus far in this thesis on the subject of whiteness; the ideology of whiteness is communicated through the English language. Authors such as Miyoshi (1993) and Ndebele (1987) have articulated this ideological impetus inherent in the spread of English. "It is not too difficult to see how English as a language became tainted with imperial interests at that time in the progress of western imperialism when the need for the standardization of technology prompted the need for the standardization of language" writes Ndebele (1987, p. 12). "In fact, I would hazard a guess that the very concept of an international, or world language was an invention of western imperialism. [...]"

Consequently, the spread of English went parallel with the spread of the culture of international business and technological standardization. From there, the jump towards

the standardization of international thought becomes easy to make. Today, the link between English and the Western corporate world is stronger than ever.”

In the texts however, speaking English appears as carrying no ideological import. It is constructed simply as a language, accessible to all, and only in the most mundane of ways is it portrayed as having an influence on identity.

Int: How important is being English-speaking to you and why?

[A few more comments pass]

Sue: I think for me, um, having been English-based, it's because it's my first language, and it's also a universal language. If I go to France they might treat me a bit badly and say, you know, 'cause they're very rude to people who don't speak French, but they'll understand me because English is possibly the most accepted universally. But that is the only reason.

Int: How important to you is being English and why?

Matthew: Well it's cool to be English because English is spoken all over the world. But besides that it's just a language, just a way of communicating.

Int: So you don't feel it's part of your identity? It's like (unclear).

Matthew: I'm sure, ja, you know, perhaps being brought up with English-speaking people. 'Cause obviously ... it's not to do with the language but it's to do with ... I don't know.

Sue claims that the *only* reason that being English-speaking is important to her is because it provides greater possibilities for communication, and Matthew states that besides this communicative access “it's just a language”. Far from conveying social meaning, the language is presented as “empty”, signifying nothing in particular.

The language that WESSAs use to describe being English is once again reminiscent of language used in discussing whiteness, or certainly the privilege that whiteness brings. John, for example, states on page ninety-eight that being born English-speaking is a *privilege*, and Christine makes the following comment:

- Christine: The opportunities we get is actually quite nice. I mean, we're already open to a pretty high standard of education, which I hated every minute of, but I appreciate the other things that I learned out of it. And um, being able to travel. I mean English people generally travel a lot more now. It's easier, from whichever country, whether they're from America or Australia or whatever, than other cultures.
- Int: Because it provides you access to like a linguistic culture? Um, a global one?
- Christine: Ja, ja, and also I suppose, um, the lifestyle we've been brought up in, money-wise and, and just conversation-wise. Other people have travelled, da, da, da. So you sit and you chat about it, and you get ideas, and it seems to be a very *normal* thing amongst white-speaking people, I mean, English-speaking people (all laugh).

Christine comments that being English offers one opportunities, and makes one "open to" a high standard of education. The construction of English as a site of privilege, while other language speakers do *not* have these opportunities is not, however, presented as shameful or inegalitarian. To be white, and to recognise that the privilege available to you is not available to others, could not be presented as harmless, but to be English and to realise the same thing is unproblematic.

English may therefore serve as a socially acceptable means of claiming the privilege of whiteness while managing to obscure the injustice of a system in which privilege is only offered to certain groups and not to others. English, like whiteness provides access to corporate business, to a global community, and to the middle-class, all the while presenting itself as an ideology-less position. Because English can be learned, it cannot be attacked as inequitable in the same way that whiteness can, but those who choose to learn it ultimately reinforce its domination of those who are unable to. The following excerpt demonstrates how English may serve as an alternative conveyor of meaning to whiteness.

Dawn: I mean white South Africans are the Portuguese, the Greeks, everything. But they're very culturally defined.

Antonia: Are they **white**?

Dawn: (laughs)

Antonia: I don't know if I consider them as white. I wouldn't.

John: Phone my mother. She'll give you a good opinion on that.

Int: Is that so?

Antonia: I wouldn't put Portuguese and Greeks in the same category as white English-speaking South Africans.

Dawn: What would you say? Mediterranean?

John: But those people are English-speaking too. The minute you say Portuguese, they speak Portuguese. They might speak English but they ...

Antonia: But then, you know, Gaelic, and the Welsh people. How far back do you go? But I'm talking about Portuguese people who have been in this country for decades.

Dawn: Are you saying that they're white but they're not English-speaking?

Antonia: No. I'm saying that they're not white, but they're Mediterranean.

John: But they're not English-speaking either, so ...

Antonia: Ja.

Int: But Antonia, ok, say for example, you know the sort of cultural taboos, even though it's greater or lesser depending on what group of people you're with, on say, marrying a black person. Do you think they would be as great if you married as Greek or Portuguese person?

Antonia: No of course not. But you asked me who would I include in white English-speaking? ... and I immediately think of WASPS and Jewish people, and that's all I think about, because they're not English-speaking, because they're not English-speaking.

Antonia's initial claim that Greek and Portuguese South Africans are not white is renegotiated when she considers the consequences of what she has said. Both John's claim that his mother, who is constructed as conservative here and elsewhere in the interview, would feel the same way, and Antonia's consideration of whether miscegenation boundaries come into play between South Africans of Anglo-Saxon descent and those of Mediterranean descent, shift Antonia's position. Whereas she had initially claimed a distinction between herself and these other groups on racial grounds, her claim changes to a distinction on linguistic grounds later, accompanied by a strong refutation of my question regarding racial boundaries – "no of course not". When her distinction is based on linguistic lines it is no longer controversial or contentious.

The importance of English in allowing WESSAs to construct a link between themselves and Europe, the western world and the international community perhaps reveals an aspect to whiteness that has been insufficiently considered by local and international scholars alike. In America, for example, some attention has been paid to the power inherent in different English dialogues (cf. Hill, 1999), but the role of English in comparison to other languages has been largely ignored. Historiography also provides some evidence for the import of theorising English. Cox (1970), for example argues that the Portuguese colonists did not develop the same racial intolerance that characterised British colonial rule. While this perspective has its critics, other authors have made the link between religious denomination and racial ideology, which may at least partially substantiate Cox's argument. Maylam (2001) suggests that it was the Protestant belief in divine election that lent itself to the development of racial inequity, whereas Catholicism encouraged universal equality of all its adherents regardless of race. Although traditionally not all Protestants were English-speaking and vice versa, there was certainly a high degree of overlap between the two.

In any event, when scrutinised closely, it is apparent that the spread of English is inextricable from the spread of discourses of whiteness around the world, and this is surely not only the case in South Africa. Further research into the role of English in developing an international class of economically-successful, capitalistically-inclined, apparently cultureless individuals, who have become the centre of power in an increasingly global world, is certainly necessary.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **7.1 WHITENESS IN THE TALK OF WHITE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOUTH**

##### **AFRICANS**

The proliferation of literature on the topic of “whiteness” in recent years has provided a backdrop against which the discourses of white English-speaking South Africans may be viewed from a new angle, an angle that allows for a fresh interpretation of the collective experience and expression of this group. The similarities that emerge on examination of the existing literature on whiteness and white English-speaking South Africans suggest that the adoption of discourses of whiteness may be endemic to this category of people, and thus the aim of this project has been to examine the talk of WESSAs in order to evaluate the extent of their employment of discourses of whiteness and to analyse the effects that these discourses seek to achieve.

The analysis presented in the preceding three chapters has sought to argue that discourses of whiteness are indeed highly prevalent in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans. Each of the three clusters of “content” that Chapter one isolated as constituting whiteness: cultural normativity, natural privilege and global capitalism, have been demonstrated to be adopted by WESSAs in their collective self-presentation. Although WESSAs, unlike Americans, do not hesitate to categorise themselves as white, they nonetheless construct this category as “empty” of culture, or neutral in the same way that Frankenberg’s (1993) participants did. Similar too to American findings (cf.



Mahoney, 1997; Jackman, 1996) was the heightened individualism inherent in WESSA dialogue. But the association between WESSA identity and whiteness extends beyond cultural issues; the connections between possession (McIntosh, 1988; Harris, 1993), capitalist business (Roediger, 1991) globalisation (Wander, Marting and Nakayama, 1999) and whiteness also relate to WESSA identity in that this group construct their collective identity as closely linked to these institutions.

While the above findings stem almost entirely from data collected using group interviews on the topic of being white English-speaking South Africans, the observant reader will recall that a second form of interview, the life history interview, was also conducted in this study. The texts yielded by the life-history interviews have been little mentioned thus far for a particular reason, and they are certainly worthy of discussion here for precisely the same reason. The transcriptions of the life-history interviews that were conducted reveal a great deal of personal information. They include career histories, love stories and narratives of emotional and psychological growth, yet they include little to no discussion of the participants' sense of racial identity. Hardly anything from these interviews may even be considered an allusion to the experience of being white. While this lack prohibited much usage being made of these texts in the analysis presented here, they are revealing in their very emptiness.

The life history interviews provide an additional perspective on the operation of whiteness for white English-speaking South Africans in that they offer a view of whiteness as a *lived* ideology. The stories that emerged from these interviews were highly individualistic; they offered no reflection on how social influences, let alone racial influences, shaped their contents. Here, in fact, was a site at which racial identity could

disappear entirely. Similar findings from life-histories were reported by Frankenberg (1993), and in South Africa by De la Rey (1999) who found that while black women professors were profoundly cognisant of their work lives as raced, white women did not describe their career histories as being shaped by their race in any way. Thus whiteness shaped not only the *talk* of white English-speaking South Africans, but also their experiences.

The question thus arises: why are discourses of whiteness so prevalent in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans? This dissertation does not claim that whiteness is synonymous with WESSA identity, in fact, discourses of whiteness are by no means the sole property of WESSAs and may be employed by a variety of other South African groups in particular circumstances. Rather, the position put forward here is that, because of the group's fairly recent European ancestry, because of their varied ethnic affiliations, and because of their lack of overt participation in the clash between Afrikaner and African nationalisms, they are positioned to advantageously employ these discourses in a manner that functions collaboratively with their usage in other parts of the world.

The most important link between whiteness and WESSA identity lies in what WESSAs seek to achieve through the usage of these discourses. This thesis has argued that the utilisation of discourses of whiteness by white English-speaking South Africans is vital in the group's negotiation of their somewhat shaky socio-economic position as South Africa undergoes radical social transformation. While discourses of whiteness are particular to the social and historical contexts in which they occur, a degree of similarity in these discourses internationally allows for WESSAs to "tap into" a transnational culture of whiteness. Not only does this permit them to present themselves as a-cultural,

and therefore more impartial than other groups, but it also allows for the group to legitimise their ideological stances through the invocation of “internationalism”. Collectively, the employment of these discourses serves to construct WESSAs as a group who have not only the objectivity, but also the knowledgeability to function as social leaders in South Africa – soothing inter-group conflict and promoting South Africa in the global arena.

## **7.2 A REVISIONIST VIEW OF WHITE ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICAN IDENTITY**

Chapter two of this dissertation asserted that it would be presenting a partially revisionist discussion on the topic of WESSA identity, and as such it is now pertinent to revisit some of the literature on the topic. The reader may have noticed that several of the quotes appearing in the analysis section of this thesis sound remarkably similar to claims made by authors on the subject of white English-speaking South Africans reported in Chapter two. This is not surprising given that most of the literature produced on the subject comes from WESSA authors, who are engaged in the same process of performative group identity construction that the participants of this study were. When seen in this light, WESSA identity may no longer be the conundrum that it has often been suggested to be.

The main mystery of the WESSAs, according to these authors, is their lack of developed nationalism and limited group-identification, which, when it is apparent, comes frequently through definition in opposition to other groups. “The English-speaking community does not burn with a sense of grievance or sense of mission” writes

Sparks (1990, p. 47). “It has no positive purposeful creed. It lacks cohesion: it is an amorphous community with little sense of any collective identity. They do not even have a proper name: ‘English-speaking South Africans’ is an appellation so vague as to make them almost anonymous. They define themselves more by what they are not than by what they are”. The claim to a lack of collective identity is akin to a claim of culturelessness; if no community exists, then it cannot possess a defining character, and group definition according to what one is *not* serves to annunciate other group definitions in contrast to WESSAs, who are constructed as a-nationalistic.

This claim to culturelessness, it was argued in chapter 4, serves to present WESSAs as simply “normal”, not possessing any culture in particular and therefore living in a “universal” way – a way in which others should be encouraged to live as it would present a solution to conflict arising from sharply defined group nationalisms. “Whatever the reasons,” writes Butler (1985, p. 171) “the ESSA has refused to beat a sectional drum. In a land where Afrikaner nationalism confronts African nationalism, what would be the point of introducing a third? Most ESSAs, I believe, wish for a society in which cultural and linguistic associations are voluntary, not compulsory, in which identity is a matter of affinity, not biological prescription.”

For a group with the numerical disadvantage, yet the international linguistic and commercial advantage that WESSAs have, the promotion of identity as a matter of “affinity” comes as no surprise. It serves to increase the number of South Africans who share their collective interests. This can be achieved on linguistic grounds and on economic grounds as is argued in chapters 5 and 6 of this report. It is not, as Butler (1985) and other authors would have us believe, purely innocent libertarianism, nor may

WESSAs be as “curiously helpless and ... pathetic” as Sparks (1990, p. 46) and others claim.

Other aspects of WESSA identity that have hitherto been puzzling are no longer when viewed through the lens of whiteness. The reluctance of WESSAs to see themselves as part of a collective rather than simply as individuals (Garson, 1976) plays into the discourse of culturelessness. The importance of retaining links with Europe and the west is no longer simply a matter of being able to escape from the country should the need arise, and the extent to which WESSA authors have heralded the group’s business acumen over their political success can no longer be seen as simply a political cop-out on the part of the WESSAs. WESSA identity, in fact, is not confusing at all. The group has merely acted in a manner that was, and still is, most likely to secure their collective interests in this country.

It has been in their own interest, therefore, that WESSAs have opted to not announce their communal interests. In South Africa, where other group nationalisms are so clearly defined, the cleverest position to adopt is one of a-nationalism. If WESSAs can convince others of their lack of self-interested ideology, they are most likely to be allowed access to powerful positions where impartiality is vital. Discourses of whiteness, through their claim to culturelessness and through their apparent legitimacy on account of their international strength provide the means for WESSAs to achieve this. Dyer’s comment, quoted in Chapter one of this work bears repeating here: “There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for all humanity” (1997, p.2). In the case of the WESSAs, this statement could not

more accurately sum up the strategic aim of the employment of discourses of whiteness in the construction of the group's collective identity.

### 7.3 OTHER ASPECTS OF WESSA IDENTITY

The discourses examined in this document do not of course constitute the entirety of WESSA constructions regarding their identities. A variety of other tropes and narratives appearing in the text cannot be seen as discourses of whiteness, and serve purposes other than those detailed above. In particular a range of discourses appeared that negotiated the relationship of WESSAs to the apartheid system, and their relative guilt or innocence for this. Van Doorn (2000) has analysed the rhetorical strategies used by white Afrikaans-speaking South African students to distance themselves from, and deny their accountability for, apartheid policies. A similar analysis would be equally applicable to white English-speaking South Africans, who are positioned to employ very different strategies to achieve the same effect. The extracts below for example, present just a few of these strategies, which were prolific in the data collected for this thesis.

Int: Do you remember the first time that you were aware that you were white? And how did you feel about it?

[A few more comments pass]

John: Ja, um, I don't know if I remember it particularly, but um, I grew up with a lot more prejudices than perhaps the rest of the family. The one thing I do distinctively remember was, uh, I must have been about six or seven I suppose, and my mother told me that white people don't shake hands with black people (Antonia and Ian laugh).

Int: Like they shouldn't?

John: They shouldn't, you just don't.

Antonia: It's *not done*.

John: Not the done thing no.

Dawn: It's like touching frogs, you might get warts.

John: Ja. And that had a, it had quite an effect on me.

Antonia: (laughs). *Shame*.

Joseph: I think it's great being English, um...having to deal with uh, or actually not, let me start that again. Um it's great being English because in a way it kind of frees you from, um, parts of the whole guilt-trip debacle.

Jared: Oh, you mean instead of being Afrikaans?

Joseph: Ja.

Jared: Oh.

Joseph: Because I think if I were Afrikaans, which I definitely am not, if I were Afrikaans first of all it would associate me much closer to white South African racist views. Being English kind of puts you a little bit further away from that, I'm more liberal.

John's story is one of being unwillingly co-opted into a racist society. The innocence that he portrays himself as possessing is acknowledged by his daughter, whose response to the story is "shame". She is consoling her father as the guiltless victim of the narrative. The second extract gives an example of the different positioning of English and Afrikaans speakers in relation to the topic. Joseph's claim is that *all* English-speakers are naturally free from apartheid guilt since it was *only* Afrikaners who perpetuated the system. This second extract may in fact bear a relationship to discourses of whiteness although it is not explicit in this dialogue. In Chapter six the construction of the western world as a liberating force was demonstrated, and Joseph's claim that being English necessarily makes him more liberal may rely on the affiliation between English-speakers and the west. While discourses of whiteness do not entirely constitute WESSA identity, they certainly permeate the vast majority of WESSA talk in varying degrees.

The extracts above, and perhaps even other extracts that have appeared in this work will sound familiar to some readers, particularly readers who are themselves white English-speaking South Africans. There is a tendency for WESSAs to dwell on certain conversational themes: Zimbabwe, crime, affirmative action and the relative value of the rand are some of the favourites. In 1985 American anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano wrote that: "White South Africans seem always to be talking about their country, its

problems, and its image abroad. It is *their* subject. [ ... ] Self-description is, like rugby, a national pastime. As it occurs among South African whites, it is repetitive, mythic, closed in on itself – a series of variations on a single theme or a small group of related themes. It is morally and politically charged. It gives a frozen and ultimately unrealistic picture of social reality that requires confirmation and reconfirmation through endless repetition” (p. 27).

More recently Steyn (2001a) has termed these circular conversations ‘white talk’, proposing that its function is “managing the contradictions of diasporic whiteness, in order to maximise the advantage of whites in the New South Africa” (p. 15). The discourses articulated in this dissertation provide excellent examples of ‘white talk’ at work. The eleven aspects of discourse that Steyn notes as being characteristic of ‘white talk’ convey the same argument that has been put forward here, for example that white talk “uses its diasporic link to mainstream whiteness”, “adopts a strategic anti-essentialism” (p. 17) and “privileges discourses of business” (p. 20). While there is indubitably much similarity between the discourses that English- and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans may employ to negotiate their place in the New South Africa, there are certainly still elements that the two groups do not have in common. It has been the task of this project to distinguish some of those discourses that are accessible only to white English-speakers, and that therefore provide a specific kind of ‘white talk’, a talk that is about being white and living in South Africa as well as about being English-speaking.

One aspect of WESSA discourse that may, in many cases be specific to English-speakers is its contradictory nature. WESSAs frequently present their identity as characteristic of one thing, and later as typical of its converse. They claim to be both



European yet South African, victims and yet powerful and in favour of transformation yet opposed to it. This duality may be what has lead authors on the subject of white English-speaking South Africans to conclude, as Butler (1976, p.11) has done, that WESSAs “feel a lack of purpose, of direction: they want to feel they belong; and they are afraid of belonging: they don’t know what to belong to.” This is the traditional logic of mental consistence, positing that individuals will always strive for cohesion of their thoughts; if WESSAs claim contradictory things it must be because they are more torn and confused than other groups.

A different interpretation of this inconsistency stems from Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley’s (1988) work on “dilemmatic thinking”. The authors claim that much social thinking is inherently dilemmatic as very few ideological positions are clear-cut. It is thus natural for an individual to express contradictory sentiments. Which position is expressed at a particular time is however crucial, since the expression will serve the purpose of rhetorically suppressing an alternative position in that context. While these authors claim that dilemmatic thinking is common to everyone, for WESSAs, who avoid constructing themselves as having a specific group identity, the strategic employment of dilemmatic identification is not only easier than for other groups, since their identity construction allows for flexibility, but is also extremely useful in negotiating responsibility for the past and privilege for the future. Michelle and Henry give a perfect example of this dilemmatic discourse.

- Michelle: Uh, I don't want to say following in the footsteps of our forefathers because we're trying not to *not* do that. I don't agree with what they've all gotten up to. I don't know.
- Henry: Ja, I think at the same time, not agreeing with what's happening at the moment, 'cause we've gone from left to right, from right to left, but (.) we need something in the middle.

Michelle is eager to express her rejection of the Nationalist government in order to distance herself from the past, and her husband is equally eager to temper this liberalism with a critique of the present political situation. In terms of identity they construct themselves as progressive – but not too radical. Henry's claim that "we need something in the middle" essentially implies that neither Afrikaner nationalists nor African nationalists are sufficiently balanced to run the country. The "middle" path that they are advocating relates to the "in between" space that they have constructed themselves as occupying. In a different context they might play up their rejection of the past only, or their rejection of the present only, but the careful balancing of the two in *this* instance serves to position themselves as moderate and rational social leaders who "know the right direction" in which South Africans should move. Butler's claim, then that WESSAs "want to feel they belong" but "don't know what to belong to" is ignorant of the strategic benefits that "not belonging" offers.

The discussion thus far has focussed on elements that are common to the transcripts of the interviews conducted, yet on first examination of these transcripts what is apparent is that they differ quite a bit from one another. This is because the stated purpose of this analysis was to seek common threads of discourse running through the texts, not to provide a comprehensive record of similarities and differences. The transcripts do differ from each other, however, in several ways. The stated political positions *vis a vis* the transformation process in South Africa vary, as does the language used by different

participants, particularly in reference to other race groups. While some participants clearly wished to portray themselves as “bona fide New South Africans”, accepting of the changes taking place in the country and supportive of them, others were not hesitant to label themselves as racist. These groups differed too on the depth or clarity of the discourses of whiteness that they employed. For some participants an unambiguous statement of African inferiority was socially acceptable, while others would have balked at this expression, and employed mainly discourses of globalisation and modernity to achieve a similar, yet less explicit effect.

While no formal measure of socio-economic status was taken in this project, in recruiting participants care was taken to include people whose material circumstances differed from each other. The range of WESSA economic backgrounds is fairly limited however, and none of either the few extremely poor or the most extremely wealthy of the group were included. Nonetheless financial status did differ. Some participants lived in large homes with swimming pools and big gardens and others in small houses or flats in need of repair. Several claimed to have struggled financially at one point or another in their lives.

The socio-economic status of the participants may be relevant in that it was notably the wealthier groups whose discourses of whiteness were of the less explicit form described above. While there is no essential reason for this difference it provides an example of Frankenberg’s (1993, p. 6) claim that whiteness is “unevenly effective”. The wealthier participants, most of whom had higher educational qualifications, and many of whom worked for larger business concerns, were greater beneficiaries of the more vague discourses of whiteness. Their educational and social status allowed them to construct

themselves as more cosmopolitan and therefore more part of the international community. They were sufficiently secure materially to be more discursively accommodating of other racial groups' assimilation into the middle classes. Those participants who were less wealthy, many of whom had their own small business concerns, did not benefit as much from discourses that privileged big business and globalisation. They did not form part of what Miyoshi terms the "transnational class of professionals" (1993, p. 742), and drew their security more from overt claims of racial difference.

This subtle class difference is in no way evidence that wealthier people are less "racist" than others, only that people who are materially positioned in certain ways may benefit more from the employment of particular discourses, whereas others do not, and must engage in alternative forms of discourse in order to reap the same social benefits.

#### **7.4 RESEARCHING WHITENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The mutability of whiteness, as discussed in the first chapter, makes it a topic that is more resistant than others to penetration through research. For this reason I feel it useful to include some of the personal and anecdotal experiences that I had while conducting the research reported here, in the hope that they will assist future researchers in devising new ways of confronting whiteness as it continues to evolve.

While the information that I managed to collect through the interviews was rich and useful, there was a particular kind of difficulty that I encountered in collecting data. There were times when I felt that participants were holding back, reluctant to say what they wanted to. Many people even seemed unsure what language was appropriate for the

context of the interview, hesitating before using a term such as “black”. One participant whom I had approached regarding a life history interview was very circumspect. I told him that my research was on the topic of white English-speaking South African identity and he enquired as to whether “it was all going to be about black/white issues”. When I explained that obviously being white was important to being a white English-speaking South African he agreed to participate, apologising for his suspicion but explaining that “there is just so much of *that* going around these days”.

How should these experiences be understood? Discussing race in South Africa may for some be a highly-charged issue, one that many people are simply not entirely comfortable in discussing. The nature of this research, however, does not permit such a general conclusion to be drawn. More relevant to this work is the intersubjective context that was created by the interview situation. My own position as a post-graduate researcher, affiliated to a progressive institution, and researching a racial topic, may have convinced participants that I was politically radical, and waiting to “catch them out” if they uttered a racist comment. In many interviews, for instance, participants seemed very conscientious to justify their comments to me so as not to portray themselves as “prejudiced”. Some of the participants with whom I was more familiar, notably Richard and Elizabeth O’Flaherty and Penny and Harold Roberts, were aware of my general political proclivities, and that they differed fairly substantially from their own. The caution that I felt from them may well have been as a result of this history.

In addition to participant concern to self-present as “politically correct”, hesitation in discussing race may be seen as constituting a discourse of “colour evasiveness”. Apparent difficulty in, or reluctance and refusal to engage with racial topics may in fact

signal that one is “putting the past behind one”, or “not really involved with those issues”. Stating that one does not wish to discuss race or is uncomfortable discussing race may actually be a form of denial of racism; disinterest in race must indicate that one is not preoccupied with it and therefore not a racist.

It was clear that, although my being a WESSA myself allowed me a degree of access to participants, in most cases there were still barriers to our interaction. With older participants, for example, my age may have presented a drawback – having not been an adult during the apartheid years, some may have felt that I was an outsider, judging them on their actions during this time. These issues rendered serious action research an impossibility. In the interests of collecting data that would be usable I frequently had to swallow both my beliefs and my anger, and at times I found the research process extremely exhausting emotionally.

Another downfall of my demographics in the research process occurred, I felt, in the life-history interviews. Perhaps as a WESSA myself my participants felt they did not need to explain any of the social, historical or cultural background to their stories, and simple references such as Jane’s comment below sufficed.

Jane: So you’d get companies, like huge companies who’d provide for their people to work as advisors. And they’d have to come, we’d do it in the evening. We would go to all the schools and recruit children. So we’d go to the schools, do presentations ask them, you know, to send application forms. We would then go through the application forms and try and get a mix of twenty children, obviously at that stage we had to make sure they were half black, half white, male, female, boom, boom, boom.

Jane’s use of the word “obviously” suggests that she felt she did not need to explain further. Had I been a foreigner for example, she may have taken more care to explain the

political and social experiences behind her statement, but our shared social history rendered this unnecessary to her.

The life histories present a good example of the complexities of accessing information on whiteness. While the more direct interviews did provide good data, as I have explained above there remained difficulties in their completion. Some of the most useful data that I obtained was from discussions in these interviews that were about topics, certainly related to whiteness in content, but not explicitly so. Affirmative action for example, and the performance of the rand (which at the time of interviewing was dismal) were topics that encouraged participants to express themselves more freely than when questioned directly about their experiences of being white.

Discussions on these topics may be the best way of accessing discourses of whiteness in South Africa, as they involve sites where these discourses are put into effect - either to combat challenges to whiteness, or to reinforce its meaning. Work such as that of Martin (2002) on affirmative action and Dixon, Foster, Durrheim and Wilbraham (1994) on discourses aimed at attaining continued urban racial segregation in South Africa provide excellent examples of how discourses of whiteness come into play in negotiating privilege in specific contexts in everyday life in South Africa.

## **7. 5 CONCLUSION: WHAT TO DO ABOUT WESSAs?**

The explosion of interest in America on the topic of whiteness over the past fifteen years has meant that it is no longer the domain of academia, but has filtered into public consciousness on a grand scale. In a recent book entitled *Colored white: Transcending the racial past* Roediger (2002) cautions against the tide of sentiment in the

USA that suggests that with whites' eventual recognition of themselves as raced, and with the increasingly diverse population demographics of that country, race in the near future should no longer present a social problem; cultural mixing will eventually render the concept meaningless. A similar troubling discourse appeared in the talk of white English-speaking South Africans.

Mark: And our mothers didn't work, so our mothers don't know black people, and they don't know coloured people and they don't know Muslim people...

Sue: But you think of how they were brought up versus the way that we were brought up and versus the way that J (daughter's name) is going to be brought up. So it's almost going to get watered (.) racism is going to get watered down, so much so that J probably won't have any at all, I think.

Penny: And I mean as far as the sort of colour differences go, her patients (speaking about youngest daughter) are totally mixed, so she doesn't really seem to see one colour or another. And the same with K (oldest daughter) and C (middle daughter) and their children at school with them. They just see a class of children, they don't think about the colour at all. So that aspect of it doesn't affect their lives. The only thing that does really is the crime.

The troubling aspect of this discourse is that it assumes that racism will automatically diminish now that apartheid is over and South Africans are living in closer proximity to each other. The claim that each successive generation will be less affected by racism means that in twenty years, any person who claims a racialised experience may be condemned as clinging to the past. In the course of my research I had reason to suspect that this discourse was in fact simply an evasion of having to deal with racial issues – particularly when I came into social contact with C, Penny's daughter referred to in the second extract, who told me that she was emigrating as living amongst black South Africans was too difficult for her to handle.

How should the issues raised in this thesis be addressed? Surely the majority of white South Africans are not ready to become race traitors of the sort advocated by Ignatiev and Garvey and described in Chapter one (1996)? Although refusal to participate in repetitious white talk may lead to inroads in the solidarity of constructed white South



African identities, the pervasiveness of institutions governed by an ideology of whiteness severely limit the amount of political agency that individuals may have in challenging these structures. The degree of interest that I experienced from WESSAs on the topic of “whiteness” when I explained my thesis provoked some optimism in me regarding the possibility of doing *anything* about WESSAs. The nature of being “cultureless”, of experiencing oneself as culturally “empty” is wistful. WESSAs sought to “fill” their ethnic identifications, and the prospect of having *something* to which one could meaningfully attach oneself, even if it was only whiteness, caught the attention of several.

My optimism on this issue centred around the notion that those who were aware of themselves as “white” culturally and ideologically would be less likely to assume its universality, and more open to genuine multiculturalism. As in Roediger’s experience however, the appropriation of the concept of whiteness by the public may mean the contortion of these ideas into discursive repertoires put to very different use from that for which they were intended. The following discussion occurred in one of the interviews, and demonstrates how discussion on the topic of whiteness may be twisted. Amanda takes the idea of “not seeing culture” to be a positive attribute, one towards which all race groups should aspire.

Int: Well, um, the kind of perspective that I’m coming from in my research, also there’s a lot of writing about whiteness, world-wide, not so much in South Africa, and the idea is to look at whiteness, you could say as an ideology, in which particularly people don’t talk about being white and see white as very normative, and see white as neutral, whereas black people are other, or coloured people are other, or Chinese people or whatever. You know? *they* have culture, *we* have ... we’re just normal.

Amanda: Ja, I read, last term, for some assignment or something which talked about how, um, a man would get up in front of a mirror, a white man, and see I’m a human, or whatever. And then, a woman, a white woman would get up and see, well I’m a woman. And then a black person would get up in front of a mirror and see, well I’m black. And so for the white people it’s not very, it’s not *there* in their face, and they don’t think about it. Whereas with black people it’s always there.

Int: And do you think that’s true in South Africa?

Amanda: Well from what I’ve seen, a lot of the time. Like there’s this one girl in my, the social psych class. And she’s constantly going on about how, black and white people don’t sit together enough and things like that.

Int: So you think that she *does* see it and ....?

Amanda: Ja, oh ja. And then that girl that I was describing in my high school, in my class. That was very evident with her as well. Oh, *I’m black* and, and things like that.

Int: Ok, so do you think? I mean, ok sorry I'm just trying to collect my thoughts here. You think that people do see race a lot more in South Africa and are very aware of their race, so...?

Amanda: Especially the black people, are very aware that they're black.

Int: And not the white people?

Amanda: I'd say white people aren't as much so, just from what I've seen. Maybe other people have different experiences.

Int: And why do you think that is?

Amanda: Because, perhaps because of apartheid, because the blacks have always been put down. And said, you're different, you're inferior ... um, and so there's perhaps the sort of natural ... I mean I'm not say...people who, when you're told well you're fat, you're stupid, you're ugly, then you come to think that way.

What then is a positive direction for the WESSAs to take in finding their place in the New South Africa? Possibly an increasing identification with an over-arching sense of South African-ness provides this direction, and certainly within the texts, discourses of South African pride were some of the only elements that challenged whiteness as a transnational ideology. The South Africa that WESSAs construct however, may still be problematic, as it is a "heart of darkness" or an "uncivilised wilderness" that WESSAs claim to love.

Int: Would you consider yourself to be African?

Antonia: Oh **absolutely**.

Ian: **Definitely**. I wouldn't consider myself to be anything else.

Dawn: I'm not so aware of it here, but when I go overseas I *know* I'm not Austrian, I'm not Swedish, I'm not American, I'm not English. I'm *African*.

Int: Why specifically?

Dawn: I don't know. I just know I'm not like them.  
[A few more comments pass]

Dawn: Oh yes. I just think, I *know* what the thunderstorms, the dust, the animals, the sunset. That's *African*.

Antonia: I can relate to that deeply.

Dawn: Ja, ja. So maybe it's not so much a cultural thing as the climate, the scenery, the...

Ian: You were obviously a witchdoctor in your past life ma.

Dawn: Maybe, maybe, Sangoma.

Int: How important is being South African and why?

Henry: It's very important. It's a lekker place this.

Michelle: I'd say it's a *unique* country.

Henry: The scenery, the climate, everything.  
[A few more comments pass]

Um, ja, as I was saying, the climate, the scenery, everything. It's wild, it's rough, it's nice. I love it. Um, I actually believe that people in Europe are becoming so bored because life holds no more challenges for them, because the book says the bus is going to be there at twenty-three past two o'clock, it will be there at that time. Here you can still rant and rave.

These discourses manage to reify whiteness through constructing Africa and South Africa as savage, untamed, contrasted to the modernity of Europe. The WESSA sense of an "empty" identity needs to be filled by an identification with something that does *not* continue to position Africa and South Africa as backward, as the polar opposite of "civilisation", but rather with something that attributes more relevance to these areas in the present socio-political world context.

Foley (1992) provides a possible solution. He suggests that as WESSAs live almost entirely in urban areas in South Africa, identification with these poly-ethnic metropolises instead of with the African countryside may allow for the group to find a sense of place in modern South Africa. To love South Africa, then, becomes a love not only of wildlife and climate, but a love of bustling urban centres where western skyscrapers sit side by side with street hawkers selling tobacco and halaal boerewors. The eclecticism of these environments is a reflection of processes of integration happening world-wide, and while they may provide sites of intercultural difficulty, they also provide an environment which is shared by, and thus common to, all its inhabitants.

While undoubtedly there is no simple or straightforward solution to the problems outlined in this thesis, for WESSAs an identification with urban South African environments could be extremely beneficial. It could assist in moving WESSA discourse in a direction away from their continued self-definition in opposition to other South

Africans towards a more inclusive form of discourse, while at the same time not expecting this inclusion to take place entirely on their own terms.

Perhaps this is, in fact, the issue that WESSAs will most need to accept if they are ever to become entirely comfortable with their place in this country. They will need to acknowledge that they are *not necessary* as social leaders; that other South Africans manage very well without their advice and guidance, and that if they wish to contribute, it should be at the request or direction of the majority, not at their own whim. This acceptance may be hard, perhaps too hard for many, and over the coming years further WESSAs may decide to go elsewhere, where their personal success concurs more closely with majority interests. For those who choose to stay, the challenges will be multiple and changing. Hopefully, the ideas put forward in this work will provide some food for thought for these WESSAs as they strive towards finding a place for themselves in the country they call home.

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## APPENDIX A – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

### Interview one – semi-structured

Interview	Name	Relationship	Age	Occupation
1.	Peter Petrakis		25	Financial Analyst
2.	Jared Michaels Joseph Burgh	Friend Friend	21 18	Student Student
3.	Michelle Nolan Henry Nolan	Wife Husband	42 40	Co-owners of small cleaning business
4.	Bradley Connelly Sarah De Villiers Charles De Villiers	Friend Wife Husband	37 24 25	Swimming-pool builder Au-pair Gardern-service owner
5.	Richard O' Flaherty Elizabeth O'Flaherty	Husband Wife	64 64	Retired plumber Retired Secretary
6.	Mathew Becker Christine Walford	Boyfriend Girlfriend	22 23	Multimedia designer Alternative healer
7.	Amanda Gester		23	Student
8.	Mark Fisher Sue Fisher	Husband Wife	32 31	Sales manager Textiles buyer
9.	Harold Roberts Penny Roberts	Husband Wife	54 56	Auto-sound salesman Bookkeeper
10.	Dawn Jones John Jones Ian Jones Antonia Jones	Wife Husband Son Daughter	49 56 21 22	Housewife Construction manager Student Marketing assistant

### Interview two – life histories

Interview	Name	Age	Occupation
11.	Wendy Potter	22	Student
12.	Karl Winckler	34	Engineer
13.	Hugh Owen	61	Farmer
14.	Jane Golding	43	School headmistress
15.	Mary Lehmann	60	Retired teacher

## **APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. Can you describe your culture?
2. Do you think white English-speaking South Africans constitute a distinguishable group?
3. How important is being white to you and why?
4. How important is being English-speaking to you and why?
5. How important is being South African to you and why?
6. Do you consider yourself to be African and why?
7. To what social class would you say you belong?
8. How do you feel about the new black elite and why?
9. Do you remember the first time that you were aware that you were white? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?
10. Has desegregation affected your life at all? If so how?
11. What do you think the role of white English-speaking South Africans is in the country today?
12. What do you see as the future for white English-speaking South Africans in this country?
13. What are the major challenges facing white English-speaking South Africans today?
14. How do the attitudes of different generations of white English-speaking South Africans (eg. your parents or children), towards living in South Africa, differ from your own?
15. How do you think that the political changes in this country have influenced white English-speaking South African politics? Have these changes influenced your own politics and if so how?

## APPENDIX C – SAMPLE INTERVIEW, CHRISTINE WALFORD AND MATTHEW BECKER

- Int: Ok, my first question *is* ... which you can answer separately or whatever. If you had to describe what section of the population you belong to, um, what would you say? (.) Any group that makes sense in *your* life?
- Christine: laughs. Um (..) that's a *damn* good question (laughs).
- Matthew: Never really *thought* about it.
- Christine: Does this have to be sort of ...
- Matthew: No it doesn't have to be *anything*. It has to be, like, how you would understand yourselves.
- Christine: OK. I suppose (..) boy.
- Int: (laughs) This is going to take a while.
- Christine: Hey? Well just as healers I suppose. Healers of self, healers ... searchers of information about healing self and others.
- Int: Mmmm.
- Matthew: ja ...
- Christine: You know, in the *broad*-range term of it, not in the ...
- Matthew: I guess it would be breaking away from an ... old way of thinking and ...ja.
- Int: Ok, and do you think there are multiple groups or just one group?
- Christine: I just think it just sort of fractalises into more and more and more specific, you know.
- Int: But that's what *mainly* you feel part of?
- Christine: Ja, ja, definitely. The positive ones, not the ones jumping on the bandwagon (laughs)
- Int: Ok, and as *such*, how would you describe your culture?
- Christine: Shew, um (..) what *background*? How we're brought up, or ... how we feel now, or..?
- Int: Well both. And one of my questions later is how do you think you've become different from your parents.
- Christine: Ok, um (..) culture? One of *those* words, um (..) I feel like it's really easy to slip into *any* type of atmosphere now, you know? Um, I can go to dinner parties and be part of *that*, or I can go and hang out with the rastas and sort of like chill out and listen to this very interesting conversation (laughs). Um, ja, it feels like the boundaries are getting more and more broad range nowadays.
- Int: *Why* do you think that is?
- Christine: Um, it seems like quite a big conscious shift towards finding a balance instead of putting everything on specific, in specific *ranks* and in specific boxes. It feels like the boundaries are disintegrating and everybody's finding ...
- Matthew: Ja people need a *cultureless* ... or at our age anyway. They need to find like a ...
- Christine: Ja. Just sort of finding more about *everything* and understanding everything, and ... saying ok I understand *that* but I don't agree with that and I do agree with *that* and ... everybody's becoming more ... completely individual. Taking little bits of *whatever* rather than having to

be a specific way and saying that, you know, you hang out with everybody in Bishop's Court, and *only* your friends are there, and *only* your children go to Herschel and, you know.

Int: I'm interested in what you said about particularly our age. Why do you say that?

Matthew: Because, I don't know, because there's been so much confusion around for so long that people have decided to break out and be whoever they *want* to be. And (.) this is the age where you kind of, have the opportunity to start moving in your way.

Int: You think, like, confusion, like *social* confusion or *personal* confusion or?

Matthew: Ag, no I'd say social confusion, cause *culture*, the word culture.

Int: And in South Africa specifically or world-wide?

Matthew: Well I've only really been exposed to South Africa ...

Christine: I'd say world-wide.

Int: (laughs) No, ja, I was just interested in what you meant by confusion specifically?

Matthew: Ja, I know, I know.

Int: Sorry, I have to like, **ply** these things 'cause even sometimes if I think I understand I need to prod you to get it like ... it just clarifies it (unclear). And do you think that there is a (.) I think you have partially answered this question (unclear) do you think that there is a culture of White English-speaking South Africans?

Christine: There is um, and there's a huge shift towards, um, moving away from it.

Int: And what makes you say that? And when you say there is, I mean what's changing? What *was* it? And what's there now?

Christine: Um, I think that people are realizing that when you **do** try and keep this culture in a specific way, it's ... it, people can't keep within those boundaries, and they're not comfortable, and then suddenly they're outcast. And you can't have everybody becoming outcast, so it's like finding that equilibrium of how you can be who you need to be and not be judged as this, specific type of person. Um, I had another train of thought but it's disappeared (laughs).

Int: Justin, what are your thoughts on the matter? While Christinesty regains her train of thought (laughs).

Matthew: (..) Hmm ... I don't know what I would say ...

Christine: There's definitely still the old-school people like our parents ...

Int: What *are* the old-school people, I mean how would you describe them?

Christine: Um, they all have specific social etiquettes. They all go to specific places, you know like you – it's "not heard of to go to that restaurant but you have to go to this one" (in a snooty British accent). And they all have dinner parties *together*, and, ja ... I remember my parents going through all those specifics ...

Matthew: Rugby and cricket cultures.

Christine: Hey? Rugby and cricket cultures, there we go (laughs).

Int: I can't believe how much people say this. I've asked people what are English Speaking South Africans like and they all say: **rugby**.

Christine: Ja, it's true hey. D (friend's name) (laughs).

Matthew: Ja, sshshsh, ja it is probably the most common kind of person, I think so.

Christine: Sit round, and drink your beer and discuss sport, and ...

Matthew: It's probably one of the biggest *social* events for white South Africans, is a sport match.

Int: So basically you also feel that it's becoming more heterogenous. You can *be* a multiplicity of things?

Christine: Ja, and as long as you're comfortable within yourself that way. As soon as you go into something that semi-still has that box, and you're not secure within just being there, then straight away you are hammered down for being an individual, you know? As soon as you are comfortable with your presence then people sort of are beginning to *accept* it more. So it's that *hard* part of being comfortable with yourself, just being.

Int: I mean, related to this, ok you were saying obviously that people are more allowed as individuals to be who they, who they are. Do you think that individuals are allowed to be more different things are individuals rather than to be one thing?

Christine: Mmmm. Mmmm. Well myself, I'm teaching yoga, and belly-dancing and doing specialised kinesiology, and (.) just everything that I'm interested in I've finally realised that I can actually go off and *do* it. But I remember as a teenager at school, growing up, this aspect of, if you're artistic you have to do fine art or graphic design. If you're academic, or if you *do* good at maths you have to be an engineer, or etcetera, etcetera. And suddenly there's these *boundless*, unlimited things that you can go off and explore and it's not out of your range any more.

Int: Ok, great thanks. Ja, sorry, was there anything else that you wanted to say?

Matthew: (laughs) No I think that's ... ja. I'll leave that question with that answer, it's good.

Int: Now this is a sort of series of questions that are all the same. How important to you is being ... how important is being *white* to you and why?

Christine: *Boy*.

Int: Incidentally this leads to "how important is being English to you?" and "How important is being South African?" (laughs). Just to *prepare* you in advance.

Matthew: I don't think it's very important to me being white, but it obviously has effects on me in a certain way.

Int: In what way has it affected you?

Matthew: Well ... being in *South Africa* (laughs) the way that I grew up would be very different if I wasn't white – obviously that would probably (..) bring out certain ways that I look at things slightly differently. There may be certain ... I don't know.

Christine: Thinking of that it reminds once of one specific time where it was actually very important for me to be a *white* (..) *English*-speaking South African. Uh, when I moved to *England*, in a very sheltered little village. And the first question was: why aren't you black?

Int: Why aren't you black?

Christine: Why aren't you black?

Int: Oh, because you come from South Africa?

Christine: Of *course*, I *have* to be black? And the second question was, um: how come you can speak *English*? and um, it carried on from there, you know. Did you live in a mud hut? Did you ride an elephant to school? etcetera, etcetera. And it was really great to prove a point that South Africa is *not* completely black, and that we *do* speak English, and that you know there is this whole culture of white people there, and – we're not *bad* you know (laughs).



Int: Ja it's quite, that's interesting as well. I don't know if you have any comments on this. Like, um, often the fact that you're white and South African ...

Christine: You get labelled as being a racist, etcetera, etcetera.

Int: Ja, they're almost synonymous. And I think I've had that problem interviewing people as well is they assume I'm interviewing them to try and *extract* racist information or something.

Christine: Yes, ja. No it is interesting 'cause I didn't actually *know* what racism was. I was here till I was seven at a, a convent school where there were *every single* which way colour under the sun. And I didn't even *think* of my friends as different colours. I don't remember, they were just friends. And I went to England and *there* I experienced racism for the first time. So it's actually a complete *flip-side* of how the world sees us, and sees other places as well. You know. Um, ja, that was really when I learned what racism was about, and I couldn't understand why people were saying because I was from here I had to be racist, 'cause I didn't even know what it was until then.

Int: Mmmm. Any comments on that?

Matthew: Ja, no I'd have to agree. I mean, when, in South Africa when schools were opened there was no racism. I mean obviously there was a little bit, like there're all these new faces coming into the school, but (.) I never experienced any racism or that sort of thing. Ja.

Int: And, also back to what you were saying about that people thought that *because* you were South African you have to be black. Ok, well let me just ask you how important is being South African first, and then we can come back to this. Sorry, ok how important to you is being South African and why?

Christine: To me, very important. *Because* of the fact that I lived in England for seven years, and, and the places that I've travelled to, I really *love* what we have here, and I find South Africans on the whole are pretty open-minded compared to the rest of the world, and have a very adventurous spirit, and um, ... ja I think growing up in Cape Town there's a very positive air around. It's great for children, it's a *really* beautiful place. And, people are quite positive thinking on the whole, *even* with all the political stuff that's gone down. And I'm very *proud* to be South African when I'm travelling around and people say where are you from?. Then ja, it's not this aspect of that I try and deny it, or (.) avoid the subject thinking about racism or anything like that. I think, people *my* age overseas understand the whole situation here and they don't label you as racist any more. They haven't grown up with that.

Int: So what you love about South Africa is the *beauty* and the people ...

Christine: Ja, ja. We've got a really *fascinating* culture, and people who haven't travelled, I don't think they realize it. And, people tend to put themselves down too much, you know oh look at this country. Where is it going? It's going down the drain, what are we doing here? Let's get out. And we have so much potential. We have so many *talented* people. I mean artistically, musically, musicians etcetera, etcetera we have a lot of talent, a lot of *highly* intelligent people with *incredible* ideas. And if we, if the *whole* of South Africa realized that we could utilize it and *become* the most amazing country. But we don't have enough confidence as a culture. Um, we expect the Americans to ... well it's just the whole thing

of, you know, look what they've achieved for themselves. They must know better than us. We'll just let them influence us, and, and run the whole game and well just sort of sit back and learn. Whereas we actually have much better ideas but we don't realise it you know. So, um, ja the potential here is amazing, and our people skills – as I said before, we are really open-minded, beautiful people as a complete generalisation, and we would be very good at dealing with whatever situations, you know? So, yes, my opinion.

Int: (laughs) Now Justin, how important is being South African to *you*?

Matthew: Well to actually say the words: I am South African. I haven't really thought about whether it would be important to actually say that. But living in the country, I think it's a beautiful country, and (.) oh, the diversity of the people, obviously gives (.) the opportunity, living here to learn a lot *more*, because of that. The diversity.

Int: And have you thought about *not* being South African, like what would that mean to you?

Matthew: (..)

Int: It's a difficult question.

Matthew: It *is* a difficult question, like I'm trying to picture myself not being South African. I suppose, ja, where you grow up *and* your country is a large part of who you *are*.

Int: And, ja, back to what you were saying about, you know people being surprised that you were *white* coming from South Africa, um, do you think that there, ok, as white South Africans, not English-speaking here, just white. Um, do we have to *prove* any sense of legitimacy at being South African because we're of European descent?

Christine: I've found that a little bit. I find it very frustrating, because (.) everybody presumes that all the black people who are here now were *always* here. Meanwhile, most of them came down when the white people came because they decided that it must be better down here and let's go check it out.

Int: In Cape Town?

Christine: Mm, well, ja, I'm not sure. I don't know South African history very well. I'm just like, going on what I've heard.

Matthew: Ja, it was Cape Town, was pretty much the place.

Christine: Ja, and it's just this aspect of people who, like, oh you know, you've gone and *invaded* that country and who do you think you are? Americans did it to America, and the American Indians were there first, and Australia were the whatever they're called (laughs) Aborigines etcetera. You know, why should South Africans be the one that are hammered by the rest of the world. We've been here long enough and (.) we *love* this country and we're not *destroying* it half as much as some other people are to their countries that they're living in (laughs). Quite honestly from what I've seen. So, um, ja. It's like, *why* don't we have a right? And *everybody* is moving *everywhere*, you know, we've got aeroplanes, we've got this whole transport mission to a t, and it's like why can't we live wherever we want to in the world, why do you have to be put in a box of, you don't belong there because it wasn't your country originally. Now, sod off.

Int: How do you feel about if Justin?

Matthew: Ja, I agree with *that*. I think everybody should be able to live wherever they want.

Int: And what *makes* you South African?

Christine: *Shew*, well from being labelled South African, English, South African, English from touring around so much, I didn't know **what** I was eventually. Um, so, I'm technically dual nationality, but I don't like that either. I'm South African.

Int: So it's like, you feel you're South African, so you're South African.

Christine: Ja, eventually I developed feeling that way. But when I came back here I was labelled as very British, and the things that labelled me that way, was my attitude, um, the way my ... um, my accent etcetera, etcetera. And it just felt like (.) ja, I don't know why I feel proud to be South African, I just ...

Int: You have that sense of nationalism?

Christine: Ja, ja. Absolutely. It's a beautiful space to come from.

Int: How important to you is being English and why?

Matthew: Well it's cool to be English because English is spoken all over the world. But besides that it's just a language, just a way of communicating.

Int: So you don't feel it's part of your identity – it's like a social tool?

Matthew: I'm sure ... ja, you know perhaps you pick up certain traits being English-speaking and being brought up with English-speaking people 'cause obviously ... it's not to do with the language but it's to do with (.) I don't know.

Christine: The opportunities we get is actually quite nice. I mean we're *already* open to a pretty high standard education which I hated every minute of it but I appreciate the other things that I learned out of it. And, um (.) being able to travel. I mean English people generally travel a lot more now, it's easier, from *whichever* country whether they're from America or Australia or whatever than other cultures.

Int: Because it provides you access to like a linguistic culture, um a global one?

Christine: Ja, ja, and also I suppose um, the lifestyle we've been brought up in, *money-wise*, and, and just conversation-wise. Other people have travelled, da, da, da, so you sit and you chat about it and you get ideas and, it seems to be a very *normal* thing amongst white speaking people, I mean, English speaking people (everyone laughs).

Int: Ja, ok. Any comments on that?

Matthew: No.

Christine: Sure? (laughs)

Int: And do you consider yourselves African?

Matthew: Yes.

Christine: Yeeaaah.

Int: Like you feel African, you feel part of it?

Christine: Ja.

Matthew: I wouldn't feel like I was at home if I wasn't in Africa.

Int: Really?

Matthew: Mmm.

Christine: Ja, well every time I go over, when I come back it just feels more and more like home each time. Like, *shew*, home-base, here we go, on the ground. It's got a very strong root here, I think. A lot of South Africans, we travel a *lot* compared to other cultures, but, um, we're very rooted in this country.

Int: Um, ok, this has to do with the question. Um obviously there are a lot of South Africans who are, like, emigrating. Um, how do you feel about that? What do you think about that?

Christine: I have a lot to say, so you go first (laughs).

Matthew: No, you go first.

Christine: You sure?

Matthew: Ja, go for it.

Int: Ja, shame he's detoxing.

Christine: Ok, well, firstly, if you're doing it out of fear its *absolute bollocks*. Nobody should do anything out of fear. You're just running away from a problem and it's just going to hit you in the face when you get to another country. 'Cause *racism* happens everywhere, *politics* happens everywhere. It doesn't make a difference where you are, and just because we've been publicised in the news more than most other countries doesn't mean that we have a bigger problem quite honestly. And, secondly, a lot of people do come back again. Or they sit there and they moan about how *bloody* miserable they are. Um, and it's like, well *fine* if you enjoy life wherever they move to – make the most of things, fine, leave. But, um, if you're doing it to escape and you're not comfortable, you're not happy then it really is silly to do that.

Int: So how do you understand people who go and come back? What do you think motivates them to go and come back?

Christine: Because they've realised that the quality of life wherever they go is actually not as good as what we have here. We are very spoilt people-wise, beauty-wise, whatever, whatever. We really have just about everything we need here. And I think you have to go away to *really*, really understand and respect that.

Matthew: Ok, I think if people spent and used half the energy they use to moan about things and run away from things and complain, and used it to focus on changing whatever they have a problem with, then ja it'll work far more than running away. And I agree with Christinessy on the fact that, ja, why don't, I haven't experienced it personally, but most people who do go away and come back do say that the standard of living here is far higher.

Int: Ok, how does your sense of - I've written here ethnicity, but you could probably say *culture*, or *group identity* or something, anything like that - different from that of your parents?

Christine: (coughs and laughs) Quite drastically (laughs).

Int: You've sort of answered that a bit already, but perhaps I can get some additional perspective (laughs).

Matthew: My parents come from a different planet (all laugh).

Christine: No really they do.

Matthew: Or / come from a different planet (laughs).

Int: Ja, why?

Matthew: Mmm, I don't know.

Int: Well what are they like, and why are you different from them?

Matthew: They're very structured and they're very ... I guess you should say down the line. They follow everything they've been taught to follow, and ... very *rigid* I suppose. They don't seem to know how to *flow* with things, they don't seem to know how to flow with change. And ...they're less comfortable with being themselves than they could have been if they were kind of in a different environment when they were brought up.

Int: And how does that impact on the difference in your lifestyles? I mean (.) do they live differently from how you live?

Matthew: They focus on different things. Well they probably focus on less actually (laughs).

Int: So what do they focus on as opposed to what you focus on?

Matthew: Ja they focus on more negative things, but also they focus on just survival and just the way things are supposed to be. As opposed to ... ja. As they expected things to be as they grew up kind of thing.

Int: And what is that. Describe what it is that they expect things to be?

Matthew: Um, the typical (.) go to school, find a job, find a career, settle down in a career, have a family, um, have some kind of social life, and just survival. Ja.

Int: And how are you different, like?

Matthew: Be more (..) exploring the self to a higher level, to (..) explore what makes you *yourself*. And (.) what can actually become of yourself rather than what is expected to become of yourself.

Christine: No definitely. I think the main thing I notice with *my* mother is how important it is to keep up appearances. Everything that *you do* is basically run by what everybody else thinks about it, you know. And it's like, *excuse me*, I'm an individual, isn't the point of living to actually *live* life and not conform life to everybody else's expectations. So I actually *started off* with that pattern and it's a huge thing for me to try and shift. It's *very* easy as soon as I get worried to start thinking, ooh what will everybody else think about that. And I *hate* it. I wish it hadn't been infused in me brain, but it has. Um, my father ... both of them are shifting in an interesting way. My mother was very Christian and she's started sort of getting a little bit into reiki and things. And she prefers homeopathic stuff to allopathic. But that's about it. That's as far as she's shifted (giggles). Um, my father (.) has always just been happy climbing up mountains all the time and living in his head and playing with his toys and he doesn't care what anybody else thinks about him so... that's, that's quite a good thing. But relationship-wise, the way that they deal with relationships is incredibly different to, to us and our friends. Ja.

Int: In what, in what way?

Christine: Oh boy. *Every way* (laughs)

Matthew: Do you want to have another interview some time? (laughs)

Int: The *major* points.

Christine: Ok, you go because I'm bad at just thinking of major points.

Matthew: Hmm. (.) No I don't think I'll go now, it'll take me far too long.

Christine: The way, the way we discuss *issues* that come up. Realising rules of the universe about reflection, and ...um, *pushing buttons* and things like that. And we're able to sit down and discuss and figure out where this comes from, and how we're reacting to each other. And that neither of us is actually **wrong**. It's a big thing with parents, that I notice with children, with each other. Putting the *blame* on somebody. It's always find a source of who did what wrong first and why everything else happened. Instead of just accepting that things *happen*, and whether it's negative or positive nothing's actually wrong. And being able to discuss through things instead of suppressing frustration at each other and then finding something else to have a go at and something else and it just gets worse and worse and worse and worse.

Int: So it's basically about levels of introspection?

Christine: Ja, there you go – good word, I must remember that one (laughs).

Int: Ok, ok, let's see what else I've got here. Ok – this is a difficult one. To what social class would you say you belong and why?

Christine: Boy oh boy! What are they again? (laughs)

Int: Well whatever they are in your mind.

Christine: *Shew.*

Matthew: I don't think that they be put in classes, *personally* ...

Christine: I stemmed from the middle class (.) originally and away I went from there (laughs).

Matthew: Ja, I think I was always middle to (.) upper-middle was always what I was told I was as a child.

Christine: Upper-middle, ja I suppose *as well*.

Int: I'm interested in the fact that you say you don't think other people should be put in classes.

Matthew: Ja I don't feel that, well I don't *think* that way so ... I suppose if other people want to think that way it's fine, but I don't feel the need for it.

Int: So you don't like see social class for yourself?

Matthew: Ja, well I'll got and speak to somebody who lives in Bishop's Court, but I'll also go speak to somebody who comes from the Cape Flats, and (.) does whatever.

Int: I for instance, with my students, they come from all *over* the place. And they, it's so beautiful to see – it's this common interest they all want to do belly-dancing you know. And some of them are, they live in ... whatever it's called up the road, Wittebome, and they come from a hectic Muslim family, and they are the youngest so they are allowed to have a little bit more freedom than their parents did. Or another person who comes from Bishop's Court or whatever. It's just so beautiful that once in a while you *do* sit back and you think about the class aspect, briefly, floating through your mind when you see all these people together in a room, having so much fun together. And it really is, like classes have just disintegrated. They don't seem to exist any more at all – I *hope* (laughs).

Int: Ok, ok. My handwriting is so small here. Ok now *this* is a difficult question. Do you remember the first time that you were aware that you were white, and how did you feel about it then?

Christine: It was the same thing of when I arrived in England and got asked that.

Int: Which *as seven*?

Christine: Yes.

Matthew: I remember the first time I was aware. I was playing with my gardener's son, at like four year's old, and I was asked into the house and (unclear)

Int: Oh. Who asked you?

Matthew: I think it was my parents who caused it, but I think it was some family, perhaps the next-door neighbour or something.

Int: And how did you feel about it then? What did it make you think?

Matthew: I think it was just a bit confusing as to why there was a big hype about it?

Int: And how do you feel about it now?

Matthew: Um (..) I think it was cool to be able to let that kid be whoever he wants to be and let them play with me, and let me play with him, and it was really pathetic that they had to *act* like that.

Int: So like, angry in some ways?

Matthew: Not angry from my side, but maybe for the other little kid, who probably felt really shit after that. Like, ok, we we're having a really cool time, I can't remember what we were playing with – I think we were playing with those push motorbikes, whatever. And he was dragged away from the situation because of where he came from, or because, the colour of his skin.

Int: So sympathetic towards him and angry towards the people who ...

Matthew: Ja, I suppose a little angry from my side as well.

Int: Ok so when you went to England and ...

Christine: Ja, I was very *angry* about that situation. I mean, I *really* (.) wished I could have stood there and said "ok so if I was black how would you be reacting to me?" You know, it's like this whole.

Int: Because people they were? Were they condemning you?

Christine: Well they were – firstly they wouldn't *believe* I was from this country 'cause I was white, and then I was condemned. I was bullied for four years of my life because I spoke differently to them, I spoke *better* than them. I mean how can somebody from non-England speak better English than *they* can. And I had a tan. And, you know, I had *manners*, and that just wasn't *on* in that tiny village in the Northern part of Britain, you know. And it was like, well if I was black and I was here I would still be *proud* to be a South African, and, and what is the *difference*, I mean we're all just people and why does everybody have to judge each other. Why can't we just accept it, and *sure* we're different. I think it's stupid trying to say blacks are the same as us they've just got a different colour skin. That's bollocks, you know, everybody *has* a certain type of cultural background, and they do *do*, and *think* and *act* differently. But I mean, why does that have to be a problem. It makes life interesting.

Int: And, uh, do you feel different about it now? Do you feel the same about it now?

Christine: I think I feel it more so now, and people must just back off (laughs). You know, just let everybody be who they want to be. There's a difference between getting frustrated with a drunken scummy person that's wandering down the road causing kack, and like having a go at them. They may be black, but no-one's saying that they *are*, that that *is* black people, there's a huge difference in generalisation there.

Matthew: And then you get upper class *black* people who try so hard to be white.

Christine: Ja.

Int: That's actually one of my questions, well it was one of my questions I keep changing these questions. So this other question was, like, so what do you think of like, black elite, black upper-class and black upper-middle class?

Christine: I think it's *sad*.

Matthew: Ja, I think they're putting up a façade just to ...

Christine: They're putting us on a *pedestal*. They're trying to be like us, saying that we are better, so they're basically playing out the role that was enforced on them in the *first place*, instead of working their way up being *who* they need to be, the way they want to be, and making their status in the world.

Int: Ok, so like moving into white residential areas?

Christine: Well that's *fine* I suppose if that's what they want, you know.

Matthew: But they musn't make the house look like a white person expects it to be. They can bring in an African feel or they can do whatever they want with it.

Christine: Ja, whatever cultural aspects they want.

Matthew: They don't have to, ja. I suppose, ja.

Int: Do you feel it's like selling out in a way?

Christine: Ja, ja, I do. It's sad, it really is (.) *they're* doing what our parents did and living in this whole façade of keeping up appearances and trying to be specific, whatever.

Int: And like, then kids. Let's say the kids who are now, let's say the kids of wealthy black people who're going to um, multi-racial schools, *good* schools that kind of thing. And have been brought up very much *in* like a white culture – um, like, what do you think about *that*?

Christine: It's reminding me of, in England the black people that are there, really are ... different coloured skin and that's it. I mean, you listen to the cockney accents that come out of their mouth, and being there, and there's been so much racism for so long they've been *forced* to be white basically. And that's the only way they survive and so they *are*. And this is what's happening here, is now these children are forced to be brought up in this white culture, and they are losing their real identities, they've been brought up without a real identity basically. And, I suppose they're happy they don't know anything different. But when they're *older* they may resent the aspect that they weren't allowed to know anything about their roots or whatever. It's, ja, it's not giving them the option of being who they need to be.

Int: Agree? Disagree?

Matthew: I agree ja.

Int: Ok, has desegregation affected your life at all?

Christine: I was out of the country for the main part of what happened, for seven years ...so. When I was fourteen – South Africa's (unclear).

Matthew: I don't know, I don't actually remember the year ...

Int: Well it started changing slowly and then from about 90 to 94 ...

Christine: Oh really, well I was here in 94. So it doesn't seem like, well I mean things *did* change. I don't know, I wasn't, I didn't want much to do with politics. I was just noticing that, like, the limitations on the racial aspect were letting up and that was a *good* thing. But there was obviously a lot of violence and that, which was not surprising. You suppress people for a long time their anger's got to blow at some point.

Int: Sorry Matthew, you were saying something?

Matthew: I can't remember now (laughs). Um (..) it didn't really affect *me* I just carried on doing anything that I would normally do?

Christine: Ja, we were all at school and uh ...

Int: And like, *now*, how multi-racial are your social circles or community circles now?

Christine: At this precise moment in time, not so much. *More* when I was at school. Ja, I've had quite a few African friends in my life, Indian. Well, with teaching I have a whole variety in my class and that's *great*. I actually really enjoy that because they all bring different sort of differences to what's going on and that's quite nice. But that's...

Matthew: Ja, I suppose that you could say that there is segregation on one hand quite strongly.



Christine: But it's also interest, you know. What social interests we have.

Int: Ja, that's actually kinda what I'm trying to access with this question, like, I'm just really struggling to encapsulate what I meant. Um, and what I was really asking was that, if there are um, black, coloured, Indian whatever people in your social circles, in your *close* social circles, to what extent are they similar and different to yourself?

Christine: Well an interesting thing happened on the last kinesiology course. Was, the whole way through for the last year and a half there's been this lovely lady (N) who's from a Muslim background and she lives with like, ten people in the house and whatever, whatever. And I've always chatted to her a little bit to her and got on fine, but I've always felt a little bit *nervous*, because I haven't really known the limitations culturally on how she does life and how the kinesiology works with her, you know. And this last time we did a lot of work together, and the problems that came up with her, or the issues that came up were, very interesting and I could understand where she was coming from. But when I started chatting it was so *easy*. You know I was always so nervous to talk to her before, you know. Which was, I don't know, silly things going in my head.

Int: But at the same time you *share* that interest in kinesiology.

Christine: *Ja, absolutely*, and I started feeling what the similarities and differences were. And the problems that she had when she was young and pregnant and how her father in law was treating her and how her husband wasn't standing up for her and all the things she was trying to *achieve* at that point. And I was just thinking, she's just a young pregnant female dealing with life, you know. And actually there isn't, even within the culture the way she reacted to certain situations was the same as anybody.

Int: And what drew her to kinesiology do you know?

Christine: Um, she (...) I'm not sure how the kinesiology itself actually started. She's a very *intelligent* woman and she's always studied. I mean when she was pregnant she was studying at UNISA, and working I think in the shop for her father in law at the same time. And she had a breast-feeding baby. I mean she was *exhausted* and because of the family structure that they had, she had to work. Um, but she wanted to study, but um, studying was such a priority to her she made herself, you know. And she just was **tripping** basically from exhaustion the whole time.

Int: So actually, uh, in addition to being exposed to, um, quite a conventional, um, Islamic background, she's also being exposed to a lot of western ...

Christine: So, ja. I always thought it *wasn't* fine for females to try and accumulate more knowledge in the Muslim aspect, but obviously in some areas it is, you know. Because she's been allowed to do *whatever* she wants to, and I think she studied Psychology for a while and then she got into the kinesiology, I'm not sure how. She obviously went to one at some point and decided – **wow** this is fascinating. And most of the work she does is just with family and friends, um and she loves it and she wants to just keep learning. And I don't know, ja, she's doing quite a few things. I'm not sure what triggered it, but she's a very intelligent broad-minded woman, and I really feel proud to know her actually. It's *amazing*.

Int: What's your take on the similarities and differences?

Matthew: Well I think there're *strong* differences but (...) I don't know, I suppose an example. I used to stay in a digs in Observatory, and get all kinds of people coming in and out, and it wasn't an issue it's just the reason

certain people were there maybe for a different reason. But their interests in common might be (unclear – dog barking loudly).

Int: Ok, like, can you give me an example?

Matthew: Like, uh, one of my housemates might come back from a certain party with a certain type of music and might come back with one or two black friends. Whereas had he gone to a different place he would have come back with white not black friends.

Int: So you're saying that ...

Matthew: Ja, it's *overlapping*, but it's not completely integrated.

Christine: Ja, music types is a very specific thing. I think there's a huge cultural aspect to what music ... even though within the culture music varies a lot.

Int: It's interesting I've heard that in one of my other interviews as well. People define themselves by the music they listen to.

Christine: For sure.

Matthew: Well that's what culture has become to people.

Christine: Hi Dad! (laughs) There's a big overlap though in, I mean well obviously with the African music, where, um, but it's also a specific type of African person that's into that type of thing. And then with the jazz. You know, I mean when you get into the funky-style. My best friend's brother is in, he, he plays with (J), and, ja, so then when we go off to those social things you get like a huge broad variety of South Africans, and a lot of **fascinating** black people that we can relate to really well. But I'm sure on other aspects when you get like your R 'n B music that is within that culture a completely *different* type of person that we *can't* relate to (laughs).

Matthew: And then you get the hip hop culture with the white people trying to act like the *black* people. Like Americans.

Christine: Like the black (laughs) ja.

Int: And what do you make of that?

Christine: I think it's quite sad.

Int: Some friends of mine were talking about some people with one sock up and one sock down, does that make sense to you? What does that mean to you?

Christine: I don't know. Well it's from America, so it's like Americans do weird stuff *anyway*.

Matthew: And ja, it's like you've got white South Africans, first of all not wanting to be *white* on one level and then not wanting to be South African – so acting like black *Americans*, which is *really* confused.

Christine: Serious escapism there (laughs).

Int: Identity crisis. Ok, so what do you think the role is of white English-speaking people in South Africa today?

Christine: To learn and spread our knowledge.

Int: To learn and spread our knowledge?

Christine: Ja, we do have a lot of access to a lot of information out there, and I think we must start learning things in a positive way and not being judgemental and ... and just, *ja*, spread, teach, discuss.

Int: Because of the access that we have?

Christine: Absolutely.

Int: Agree? Disagree?

Matthew: Ja, I think everybody should, I don't think (.) white English-speaking South Africans. I think *everybody* should have the same role and that is to grow.

Christine: And the more you have access to, the easier it is to ...

Matthew: Ja, ok.

Int: And growing *individually*, or as a society?

Matthew: Well one kind of facilitates the other so ...

Int: So you would say then, for example ...

Matthew: If everybody was stronger within *themselves* then society would be stronger, so it's cool.

Int: So in some ways we have like a role to fulfil in society by (.) honouring ourselves?

Matthew: That's exactly it.

Christine: Perfect.

Int: And what do you see as the future for white English-speaking South Africans in this country?

Christine: *Shew*. If everybody started following their *hearts* instead of what everybody else says, then I think we could really be a successful culture in *every* aspect.

Int: And do you think its *probable*? Because I see what you're saying about we create our own future, but if we sort of took a trajectory of where we're going at the moment and created a *probable* future?

Christine: It really feels like this two steps forward, one step back thing at the moment, ja. But I think it will ...

Matthew: Least it's not one step forward and one step back (laughs).

Christine: Ja, exactly, so I do feel that we're being, we're going forward, but once in a while this doubt sets in and everybody goes, (intake of breath) can we actually manage this. (unclear). So I think in the *long-run*, yes, things are going to go well and we will *eventually* set up a positive, productive society.

Int: And an integrated society?

Christine: Ja, sort of acceptance of each other, not *having* to be the same, not having to be (interruption – tape ends).

Int: And Matthew, what do you think is the probable future?

Matthew: Probable future? I'll just say for positivity that I reckon thing will go the way, will go the *right* way. But, ja, go an optimistic way.

Int: Now hang on there, I'm getting definite hints of ambivalence there ....(laughs).

Matthew: Ja, I reckon things *can* go a good way but certain attitudes need to *shift* for that to happen.

Christine: But long-term do you think it is going to happen?

Matthew: Uh ... *ja*. No I wouldn't really want to give a clear answer on that. I would, I would need to think about that. I wouldn't really know the entire state of things.

Int: And, ok, what attitudes need to change to get there?

Matthew: (.) Well (..) I suppose all the attitudes, like the negativity, like people running away from the country, and (..) you know, people holding onto things from the past. And, ja, I wouldn't be able to, I couldn't get a clear view on what percentage of people it would be or not, but there's definitely a large chunk of people, not kind of giving out the positive attitude and be willing to change and grow.

Int: And hanging on to things from the past – what things from the past?

Matthew: Well, *obviously* the apartheid thing (.) um (..) I don't know, there's just the blocks between all the different cultures, between Afrikaans and English, and the black and the white and the coloureds and the blacks and ...

Christine: The judgement as to who's right and wrong.

Matthew: Ja.

Int: So *everybody* needs to let go of the past?

Matthew: Ja, everybody, ja.

Int: Are there people at the moment that you feel are not? Like, are there specific groups of people who are not letting go of the past?

Christine: Most groups (laughs)

Matthew: I'd say there's and even pattern everywhere, there's a certain chunk of each group – and a certain chunk in all of us.

Int: And it functions obviously in different ways for different groups too. *Alright*, you've kind of answered this as well, but I'm just going to run it by you quickly and you can just ... see if you've got anything additional to say about it. Do you think life is better overseas and why?

Matthew: The grass is *always* greener on the other side. I've never been overseas ... um, so I can't really answer that one clearly. From what I've heard ... the majority of aspects is far easier here and far better here.

Int: And I know *you* feel ...

Christine: Well, *every*, every country has it's positive and negatives.

Matthew: That would be to my personality. I'm somebody who would enjoy the *natural* surroundings and that sort of things, but to somebody who was a workaholic they would probably go and work in London, or go work in America or something. So I suppose it depends on your personality type.

Christine: One of my students is going back to London because she doesn't like the sun, she likes being there.

Int: No. That's not normal (laughs).

Christine: That's what I said, there's something wrong with you, but anyway.

Int: Ok, now the last two questions are *political* questions.

Christine: Oooh. I don't know anything about politics.

Int: That's ok, they're not supposed to be, like I don't need an *informed* answer. I need a sort of intuitive answer.

Christine: Ah, ha. And the question *is* ..?

Int: Ok, the first question is...how do you think the political changes in South Africa have influenced the politics of white English-speaking South Africans? As a group.

Christine: Oh, I don't know.

Int: Or not as a group if you don't feel ...

Matthew: Ja, I think most *younger* white South African English-speaking people have moved *away* from the idea of politics.

Int: And why is that do you think?

Matthew: Well that's just people I know, because ...

Christine: It's petty and conformed and it's not actually being creative.

Matthew: It's not getting anybody anywhere.

Int: And do you think it *could* get people somewhere, or do you think by its nature it doesn't?

Christine: Well (unclear) the word politics I don't think I'd ever want to, but if we have a *different* social structure at some point ...

Int: Uh social structure ...?

Christine: Well, ja, that's the wrong word hey ... like society thing (all laugh). Ja, like non-politics. Something else that basically keeps things *running*. Keeps the basic...

Int: Any ideas as to what kind of things ...?

Christine: Well I think it's too *linear* at the moment. Politics is very linear and needs to be able to be much more flexible because humans naturally aren't linear – we float off in whatever directions. We just need gentle boundaries. You know, uh, if we're not trying to be forced into such small spaces then we're not going to try fight our way so much.

Matthew: Ja, given less reason to struggle.

Christine: Ja, it's like that bamboo that is strong but moves in the wind, you know.

Int: And ok, you've said a lot of people your own age have sort of, lost interest in politics. What about *older* people? What about your parents' generation and that kind of thing?

Christine: Well my father doesn't really give two hoots.

Int: Did he ever give two hoots?

Christine: Well he was worried about it at one point when the situation was quite bad as it was, whatever. But um, he's never been like, *interested* in what's going on – he's just been wanting to know the country's going to be ok.

Matthew: Mostly just worried about the economy.

Int: Ja, cool, ok, and this is basically bringing it to a personal level. How has living in South Africa influenced your *own* political viewpoints?

Christine: Well I think that, also when it comes up to elections and stuff, compared to England it is *absolutely* disgusting how they don't publicise *exactly* what each party is about. I don't know anybody who has any clue. They suck it out of their thumbs as to who they're going to vote for. You know. And I mean, if you really (unclear).

Int: Like what do they do in England that they don't do here?

Christine: Um, they put *fliers* out. It's your choice, they leave it in post-offices and things like that, and you can go and read little notices or flyers about this specific person and this specific party, depending on the region. Um, it, putting things out on the news at the end of the news each night – a different party gets to give a talk about what they want for the country, and blah, blah, blah. I mean, ok, I don't *watch* the news so I don't know if they do it, but when I have switched it on I have never seen anything about the parties. It just seems to be word of mouth or something.

Int: But do you *feel* that you have quite a good idea of what each party stands for?

Christine: No I don't really have a clue, and I'm quite happy not voting even though everybody says well vote just to keep the wrong parties out, type of thing, even though none of the parties are really right. None of them are really that good. I'd be very happy voting for the green party, but she didn't get her arse off the ground properly, so.

Int: So in answer to the question how has living in South Africa influenced your own political viewpoints ...?

Christine: It's made it, it's pushed me further and further away from (.) that sense of actually giving two hoots about what's going on in the political world.

Int: Because it's inaccessible?

Christine: Ja, and it's aggressive (.) and you see them in parliament on tv, the way they're fighting it's just ... you don't want to watch that. I mean they can't

have decent discussions, they push each other down all the time, and it's just, it's just an *aggressive thought*, politics, basically.

Matthew: You know I think I would feel the same about it in *any* country though.

Int: Really? You don't like the idea of politics at all?

Matthew: Ja.

Int: And life in South Africa hasn't changed that in any way?

Matthew: (.) Intuitively I'd have to say no. And intuitively I'd have to say that if I was brought up somewhere else I'd probably still feel the same way, despite this country's interest in politics.

Int: And you say intuitively... is there something else? Is there another way that you would think about it that you would feel differently?

Matthew: Well, by experience. If I *experienced* the politics of another country then I'd be able to say well, then I'd have reacted differently to these kind of things.

Int: So you just feel that personally you're not politically inclined?

Matthew: Ja, and I wouldn't blame it on the state of South Africa, I would just, that would just be *me*.

Int: And what, what do you not like about politics?

Matthew: Um, kind of, most of what Christine said about just the whole structure and the rigidity, and ... that kind of things have to be this way or that way, and ... better argue about this if you want to get this many votes for that, and I don't know.

Christine: At least in England it's comical.

Int: Ja, the lobster guy – did you see that in paper? The jelly-wrestling party or something?

Christine: Oh my *goodness*.

Tes: And he advocated a tax on blondes! (laughs). He wanted to change the millennium dome into a jelly-wrestling ring.

Christine: Really? You see that's how to keep people *interested* in politics (laughs).

Matthew: Then it becomes *marketing*, so.

Christine: Ja, I know that's basically out there.

Int: Ok, well I'm out of questions, is there anything else that you want to say? That you feel I've left *out*? That you want to ask me? That ...

Christine: It's a very interesting subject. It's nice that you *are* approaching it from a non-racial aspects and I hope that everybody realises that.

Int: I mean, *obviously* there are aspects of it that *are* racial...

Christine: Ja, but it's not like, racist it's just difference.

Int: Ok well thank you very much.